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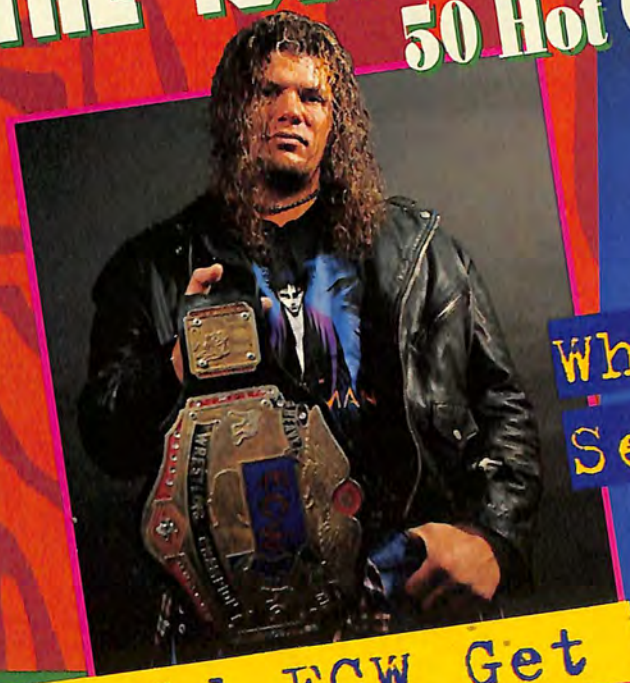

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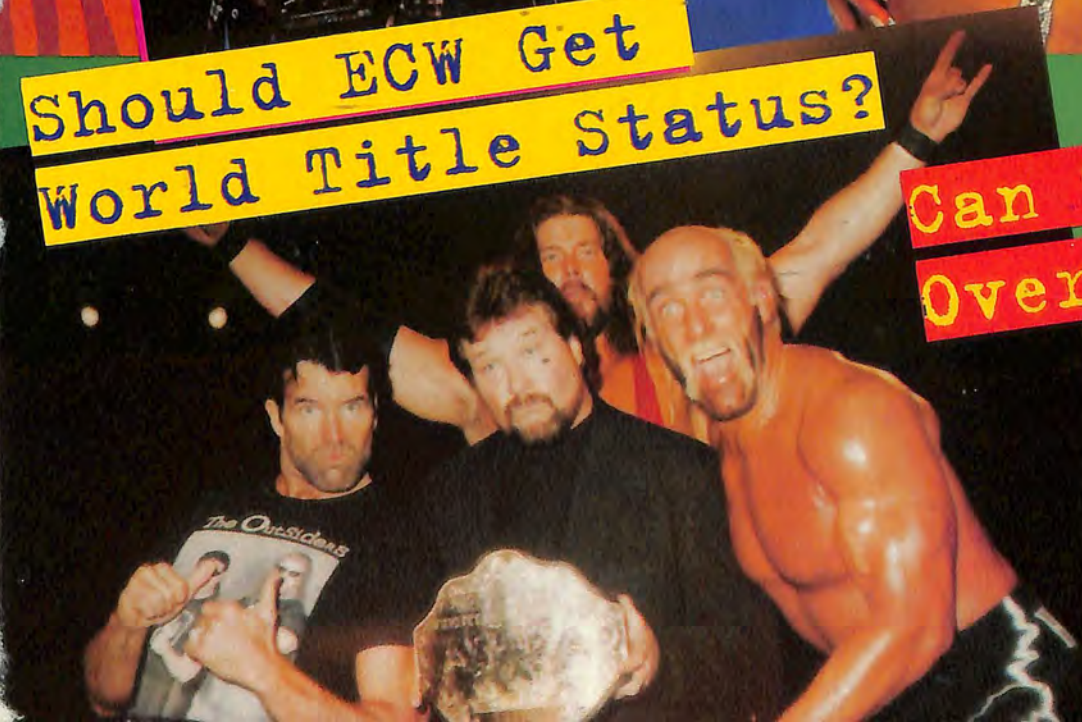

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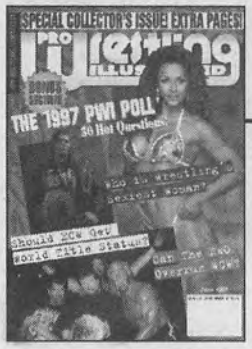
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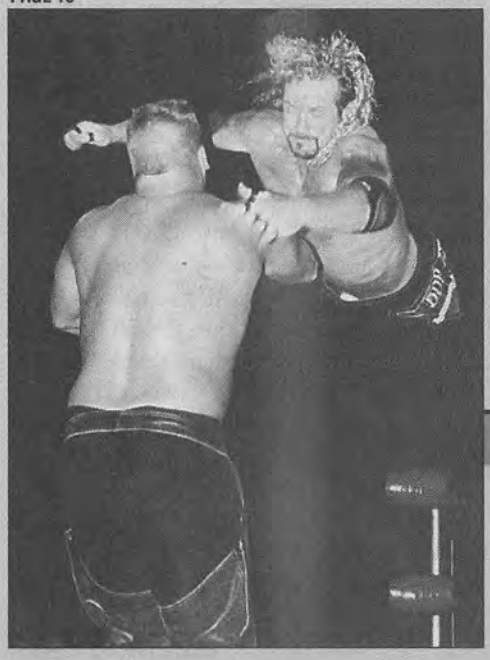

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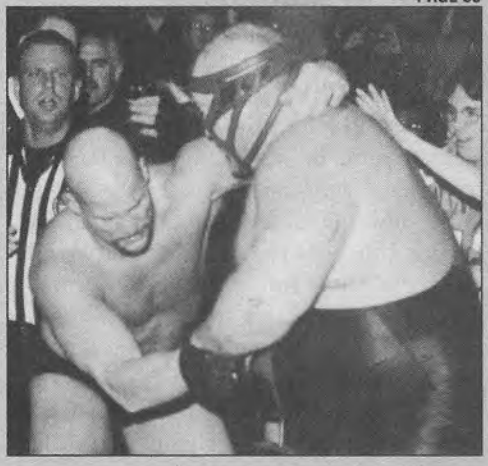

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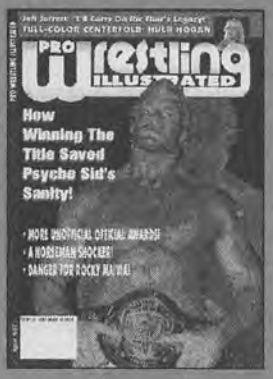


"Psycho" Sid beat Shawn Michaels for the WWF title in front of a pro-"Psycho" crowd at Madison Square Garden in November and was featured on the cover of our April issue. Although Sid was cheered then, many readers had mixed reactions to his victory; some were glad to see Michaels win the belt back.

"It's about time Sid won a world title," wrote Tina Andrews of Springfield, Missouri. "I've been following his career for many years; I thought he was championship material all along."

"Sid has finally proven to everyone what I knew all along," said "*PWI* Hotline" caller Dawn Rogers of Hudson, Florida, "Sid is not an underachiever, and he proved it by winning the belt!"

Now that Michaels is champ again, does Sid stand a good chance of winning the belt back? Will he have only one WWF title reign? At least one reader thinks so.

"Sid never should have had the belt to begin with!" said "*PWI* Hotline" caller Nat Yake of New York City. "Shawn is the best wrestler in the WWF—bar none!"

TWO NEW CATEGORIES?

I think the editors did a great job on the year-end special issue of PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED (March 1997), but I have two suggestions for next year's Achievement Awards. I think it is time to bring back the Broadcaster of the Year award, since the Monday night war between WCW and the WWF has gotten so intense and there so many broadcasters on the two Monday night shows. I also think that it is time to institute a Pay-Per-View of the Year award, especially since there are two almost every month now. In my opinion, the winners for 1996 would have to be Jim Ross as Broadcaster of the Year and Starrcade as PPV of the Year. I think that other fans would also support these two new awards.

CARL R. LOUK
Prince George, VA

Should we create a Broadcaster of the Year award for next year? Reader Carl R. Louk thinks so, and if we did, he'd probably vote for the WWF's Jim Ross.

A TIME TO HEAL

I think it is time for Sting to come out of his nest in the sky and take on the NWO. He probably could singlehandedly destroy the NWO if you consider all the anger, hatred, and animosity he has developed toward that group. However, just in case, Sting should enlist the help of other WCW outcasts.

Last time I checked, The Giant and "Diamond" Dallas Page were available. The Giant is a great choice considering his knowledge of the NWO. "Diamond" Dallas would make an equally fine edition to Sting's clique, especially since he has had the guts to use his "Diamond cutter" on those NWO punks. Finally, since "Macho Man" Randy Savage has been seen with Sting a lot lately, I believe he, too, would make a fine addition to Sting's group.

Sting, it is time for you to become a leader, not just for WCW, but for all the fans who despise the NWO. It is time for you to heal your wounds by destroying the New World Order.

TREVOR KNIGHT
New York, NY

☎ ACT OF ARROGANCE

I recently attended a WWF show at Philadelphia's CoreStates Center, and I was appalled by the actions of Intercontinental champion Hunter Hearst Helmsley. As he was getting into the ring, he ordered ring announcer Lance Wright to get down on all fours on the arena floor. At first I thought Helmsley wanted Wright to kowtow to him. However, Helmsley used Wright as a step to get into the ring. How dare this pompous jerk treat another human being like a piece of dirt! Just because Helmsley is wealthy and is the WWF Intercontinental champion, he has no right to treat Lance Wright—or anyone else, for that matter—like this. Would Helmsley ask his mother to perform a deed

WWF Intercontinental champ Hunter Hearst Helmsley had the gall to use ring announcer Lance Wright as a step when entered the ring for one recent match. "*PWI* Hotline" caller Sarah Kunzler was outraged.

like that? Of course not.

WWF President Gorilla Monsoon should fine or suspend Helmsley for his degrading actions. I would even go so far as to strip Helmsley of the I-C title if I was the WWF president. That would send a message to every wrestler in the WWF.

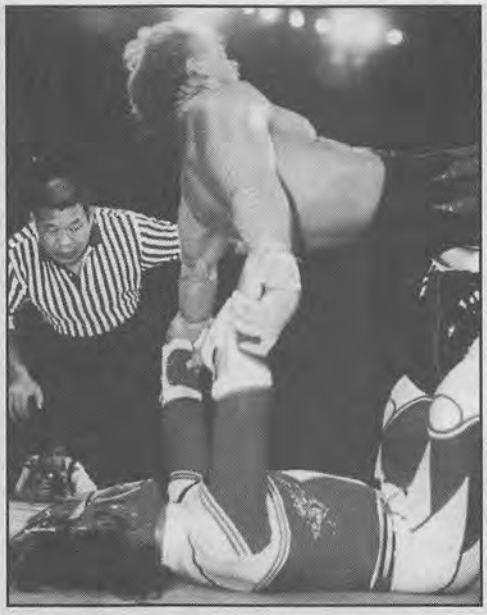
SARAH KUNZLER
Kutztown, PA

GOOD OVER BAD

In a bizarre year during which one wrestler pulled a gun on another wrestler, the New World Order ran wild on WCW, and the WCW-WWF war got out of control, it was good that there were at least four uplifting, positive stories and at least four men who genuinely deserved to be voted Inspirational Wrestler of the Year.

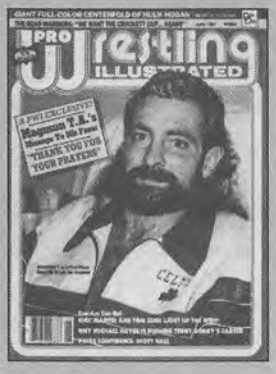
Jake Roberts, the winner, was able to fight the demons called drugs and alcohol with the help of religion. First runner-up

(Continued on page 70)



Jake Roberts was voted Inspirational Wrestler of the Year for 1996, but Jushin Liger (shown against Chris Benoit) finished second. Michael Smith III was glad there were several inspirational wrestling stories last year.

10 YEARS AGO IN PWI



The cover of the June 1987 issue of *PWI* featured an exclusive photo of Magnum T.A. after his career-ending car accident. At the time, Magnum wanted to express his appreciation for all the prayers fans said for him during his long hospital stay.

Elsewhere in the magazine: WWF World champion Hulk Hogan graced the centerfold and was looking forward to his showdown with Andre the Giant at WrestleMania III ... Reasons why Michael Hayes might have been ruining the career of Freebird teammate Terry Gordy were put forth ... In "Press Conference," Scott Hall discussed his reasons for leaving the AWA and his goal of winning a heavyweight championship ... Despite winning the Jim Crockett Sr. Memorial Cup the year before, The Road Warriors were determined to repeat in 1987, and they talked about why ... Rick Martel and Tom Zenk, one of the hottest teams in the WWF, tried to show why they didn't deserve to be called copycats.

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RINGSIDE

With Bill Apter

Enemies just a few months ago, Savio Vega and Faarooq are now united in the Nation of Domination (above). Savio is supportive of Faarooq in his battles with Ahmed Johnson (right), and he'll probably help him try to lure more of Ahmed's friends into the NOD.

THE NATION OF Domination is growing so rapidly in the WWF and USWA, it's beginning to steal some thunder from the unsurgent NWO in the rival WCW. Their most recent recruit at press time was **Savio Vega,** and they were in hot pursuit of young sensation **Rocky Johnson.** Now, if they sign Vince McMahon ...

"A lot more of your fan favorites are about to join the **Nation of Domination**!" said the group's leader, **Faarooq**. "We shocked the world when Savio Vega embraced our cause and joined our movement. Now, **Ahmed Johnson,** you are hereby placed on notice that anyone you trust to help you in your efforts to battle the Nation of Domination might indeed be *our* next brother!"

Ahmed admits that he's afraid the group will land Maivia, another good friend of his. "I saw them slipping Nation of Domination propaganda under his dressing room door," he says. "The guy is young, and sometimes young people don't use their heads. They could offer him a lot of money and a lot of opportunities that might take

PCW and ECWA wrestler Lance Diamond (left) spread some ugly rumors about Marlena recently. When Marlena and Goldust (above) heard about this, they came after Diamond on the independent circuit, but they haven't shut him up yet.

him years to get if he wasn't part of that group."

Rocky says he has destroyed every piece of NOD literature he's been sent and will do the same to anything else he receives from the group.

"My parents always warned me not to get involved with gangs," Maivia told me. "The Nation of Domination wants me and all of Ahmed's friends to turn against him. Ahmed, I'm telling you right now that you will never see Rocky Maivia as a member of the Nation of Domination!"

The NWO's arms, meanwhile, have now stretched all the way to the Orient's New Japan Pro Wrestling organization. As you know, several months ago, the rulebreaker group brought **Masa Chono** into the fold. From his Japanese based NWO office, Chono has now enlisted his first, of what he says will be many, recruits. **Hiroyoshi Tenzan,** a long time friend of Chono, made his NWO debut, teaming with fellow members **Marcus Bagwell** and **Scott Norton** to defeat **Takashi Iizuka, Junji Hirata,** and IWGP heavyweight champion **Shinya Hashimoto.**

"Next, **Hiro Saito** will follow," Chono said. "Then, I will may go after **Jushin Liger, The Great Muta,** and perhaps even **Hashimoto.**"

Said NJPW President **Seiji Sakaguchi**: "There is nothing I can do to stop what Mr. Chono is doing. I can only trust that wrestlers like Mr. Liger, and Mr. Muta, and others will stay true to NJPW, and not be influenced by the money and supposed glamour the NWO offers them."

A furious **Goldust** took a brief break from his WWF schedule so he could appear on independent cards and "defend the honor of the lovely **Marlena**." Both nights, at his request, he battled non-WWF wrestler **Lance Diamond**. Seems Diamond, who wrestles in Pennsylvania Championship Wrestling and in Delaware's East Coast Wrestling Alliance, had been brag-

ging to friends that he went out with Marlena quite a few times just before she began her relationship with Goldust. He went on to say that although Marlena begged him not to drop her, he had other women yearning to go out with him and wanted to give them all a fair chance.

Unfortunately for Diamond, two WWF talent scouts were in the dressing room when Diamond told the story one night, and they relayed it back to Goldust. Marlena told Goldust she had never even heard of Diamond, much less dated him. Fans who witnessed their matches admit they've never seen Goldust so angry. After one of the matches, Diamond sarcastically told our reporter, "No, I didn't mean any of that stuff about me and Marlena. I'm sorry Goldust took it so seriously that he felt he had to come here and have me kick his gold butt!"

Have you figured out the answer to the trivia question from our May issue? In case you missed it, the question was as follows: In 1971, **Dory Funk Jr.** defended the NWA World title several times in Tulsa, Oklahoma. One of those defenses was against **Harley Race**. What now-famous broadcaster was the referee for that match? The answer? Good ol' J.R. That's right, **Jim Ross**. This issue's brain teaser is this: This man's real name was **Gene Dubuque**. He and his tag team partner **"Handsome" Johnny Barend** feuded with **Skull Murphy** and **Brute Bernard**, **Antonino Rocca** and **Miguel Perez**, and **The Fabulous Kangaroos**, among others. He was managed for a long period of time by **Mr. Kleen**, who eventually became **The Grand Wizard**. Who was he? The answer will appear in my July column.

Ric Flair has had several informal meetings with the manager of the original **Four Horsemen**, **J.J. Dillon**, but nothing significant has come out of them as of yet. Flair feels that besides him and **Arn Anderson**, the Horsemen still need one more totally dedicated member from the past to keep things together, and Dillon could be that man. The in-fighting between **Steve McMichael** and **Chris Benoit** has continued even though Flair keeps saying that the group is united again.

Canadian Wrestling Federation wrestler **Vance Nevada** has split up with his tag team partner and friend **Bugsy Sluggliano**. The break came when Vance ousted Bugsy in a 12-man battle royal. "It

(Continued on page 10)

J.J. Dillon was the manager of The Four Horsemen when the group was first formed in the mid-1980s. With all the trouble the current Horsemen are having, Ric Flair has talked to Dillon about rejoining them.

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(Continued from page 8)

Barry Windham considers these two men—The Blackjacks—to be the toughest tag team of all-time. He may be biased, as Blackjack Mulligan (left) is his dad. He and Justin Bradshaw are thinking of forming their own version of The Blackjacks.

was every man for himself, and Bugsy would have done the same to me," Nevada says.

"I always put our friendship above everything else, and I would have split the win with Nevada if me and him were the last two guys left. I can't believe he did that to me." Bugsy is now teaming with **Dave Levinsky**. The three of them used to be known as **Models Inc.**, a trio hated by the fans ... The Ultimate Wrestling Federation, an organization based in Queens, New York, announced that it has signed **Jim "The Anvil" Neidhart** to a lucrative multi-year contract. A spokesman for the UWF said Neidhart is a "great asset to the organization and will help us build a stronger promotion in the future."

Barry Windham is very proud of his heritage. Always has been. He idolized his dad, **Blackjack Mulligan**, when he was growing up, and he told me of the dream he has that's connected to his dad's career.

"He and **Blackjack Lanza** formed, in my opinion, the toughest tag team ever seen in our sport, **The Blackjacks**," Windham said of the team that held the WWF World tag team title toward the end of 1975. "I recently had the opportunity to get into the gym with **Justin 'Hawk' Bradshaw**, and if things work out, we might form a new Blackjack team to carry on the great tradition that my dad and Lanza started. I was a little hesitant to work with Bradshaw at first, but he's really showed me a lot when we've been sparring together."

That's all for now. I'll see you at ringside! □

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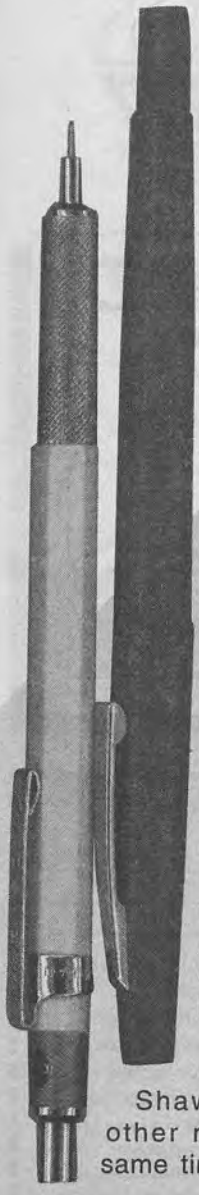
Stuart M. Saks

EITHER SHAWN MICHAELS is the bravest man on earth ... or he's the stupidest!

I've asked myself over and over again, why would someone in a position like Michaels' put himself in a situation in which he is unable to control his own fate? Why would he participate in these so-called "triple-threat" matches, knowing that there is a very real possibility that he could lose the WWF World title without even being directly involved in the finish of the contest? I am the publisher of PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED, and I'm going to be until I decide I don't want the job anymore or the owner of this company decides that I'm no longer capable. But I'll never lose my title because somebody else screwed up.



"It's different for you," Shawn Michaels told me when I presented him with the same analogy. "You lose your title and that's it. There's no chance you'll ever get it back. Me, I lose and I know I can always get it back the next time."

Granted. But why a triple-threat match, Shawn? You and two other men wrestle at the same time. The first man to score a victory against either of the two is declared WWF World champion. You don't even have to be the man pinned to lose the title!

"Did you ever go to Atlantic City or Las Vegas?" Shawn asked me.

"Why, yes, of course."

"Then I'm assuming you've gambled?

"I'll play blackjack, but that's about it."

"Ya like it?"

"Why, yes, especially when I win."

"The thrill isn't winning," said Shawn, "it's the action. The uncertainty. The unknown."

Seems to me that being a professional wrestler, particularly a world champion professional wrestler, would provide enough thrills. What more could you possibly need than stepping into a ring with a hungry challenger in front of 20,000 fans?

"Do you have any idea what that belt is worth?" Shawn asked, seemingly helping my argument. "Millions, and I'm not exaggerating. When I get in the ring with 'Psycho' Sid and Bret Hart, I'm in there with two of the best wrestlers in the sport. I'm not only gambling that I'm better than both of them, but that I can win the match before one them beats the other guy.

"What a rush!"

Yeah, when you win, but would he be singing the same tune if the outcome wasn't in his favor?

Shawn is not stupid, but he is being stupidly brave. As good as he is, he really has no assurance that he can be the victor, let alone win before one of the other two participants can. Several times he was able to break up pin attempts by Sid on Bret or Bret on Sid, but there were also times

Shawn Michaels showed a lot of courage by taking on "Psycho" Sid and Bret Hart in a series of triple-threat matches. Probably too much. He could have lost the WWF title without even being in the ring.

By sanctioning matches in which Shawn, Sid, and Bret were allowed to be in the ring at the same time, the WWF gave fans who saw any of the triple-threat bouts a lot of excitement. It may have also devalued the WWF title a bit.

when Shawn was tossed from the ring and unable to have any control over what was happening inside. I'm not comfortable with the idea of not being able to control my own destiny when that much is at stake.

"But you're not me," Shawn laughed. "You don't become Shawn Michaels by being like everybody else. I dress differently, I conduct myself differently, I think differently. I'm not saying this to be immodest, but you don't achieve greatness by being like everybody else. How many people do you know who is the best there is at whatever it is he or she does? If we were the same as everybody else, we wouldn't be the greatest."

In its own way, that makes a lot of sense. So maybe I'm attacking this triple-threat issue from the wrong angle. Maybe it's not Michaels I should be questioning, but rather the WWF for sanctioning such a bout in the first place.

In a sport where, by its very nature, lunacy prevails, there should at least be some dignity reserved for the most prestigious titles. The fact that a champion can lose his title without being directly involved in the outcome only serves to lessen the credibility of the championship.

If Michaels loses because Hart and Sid chose to pool their efforts against him, or if Michaels loses because he can't prevent Hart from pinning Sid (or vice versa), we have a big problem on our hands. Michaels might not be talking about his adventures in Las Vegas and Atlantic City, but rather be pounding on the door of Gorilla Monsoon in Stamford, Connecticut. And added to the WWF World title honor roll would be the name of a man who didn't have to do what all others did: convincingly beat a champion in a one-on-one encounter.

The WWF should be commended for trying to be innovative, but a line has to be drawn at the point where artificially created excitement overtakes common sense. You can promote all the bizarre specialty matches you want; just leave the World title out of it. □

in focus

By Dave Lenker

BAD DAYS IN MEMPHIS

As Roddy Piper walked out to a deafening ovation from the *Monday Nitro* crowd at Memphis' Mid-South Coliseum on February 3, I couldn't help but shake my head. Not because I couldn't understand why the crowd was so pro-Piper—it's pretty obvious why—but because it made me think back to all the times the old building used to rock like that.

How *regularly* it used to rock like that.

How regularly the USWA used to hold great cards in this arena.

It made me think a lot about the USWA. The USWA doesn't run cards in the Mid-South Coliseum anymore. Its weekly shows are now held in a place called the Big One Expo Center, which also hosts, among other events, flea markets.

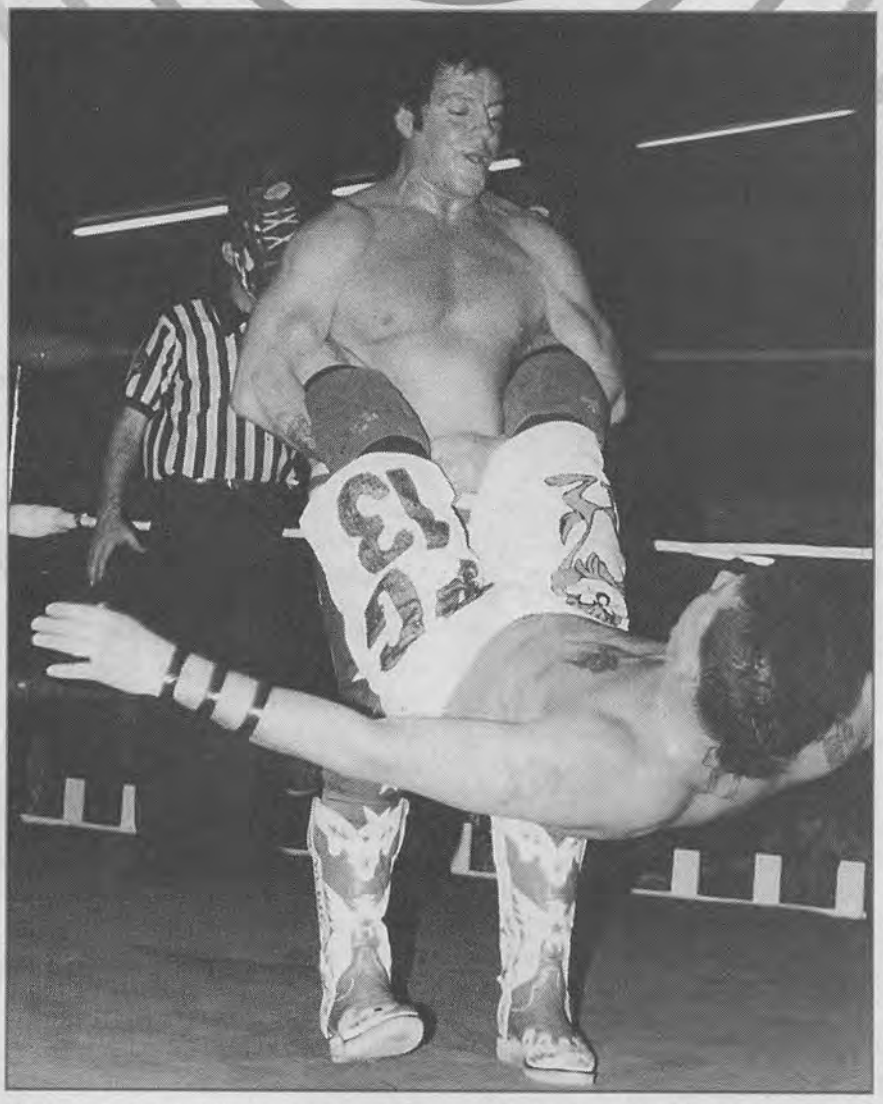
The USWA, I'm sorry to say, is in trouble.

Just months after I began working for this magazine (May 1993), I was out covering USWA cards at the Mid-South in which thousands of people jammed the arena to see Owen Hart battle Jerry Lawler ... Jerry Lawler battle Randy Savage, with Vince McMahon in Savage's corner ... even Bret and Owen Hart take on Jerry Lawler and Jeff Jarrett. When I was in Memphis for a USWA card a few months ago, only a few *hundred* people turned at the Big One Expo Center.

Too bad.

There are a number of reasons why the USWA is in such bad shape. The most glaring is a lack of big-name talent. Jerry Lawler's WWF commitments keep him from wrestling in the USWA as much as he should. And Bill Dundee, well, as courageously as he's fighting the USWA branch of the Nation of Domination, he shouldn't be one of *the* main players in any major federation at this stage of his career.

After Lawler, Dundee, Wolfie D, J.C. Ice, Brian Christopher, and Mabel, there aren't any well-known names on the USWA roster. Since Wolfie and Ice are part of Faarooq's Nation of Domination in the WWF, how long will it be before they're in the WWF full-time? Sooner or later, Christopher will end up there, too. Mabel is probably looking back at his best days. And if Lawler and Dundee aren't there, that leaves, let's see,



Matches between Bill Dundee and his son, J.C. Ice, have headlined a number of USWA cards lately. That's not good news for the Memphis-based promotion.

Kareem Olajuwon ... Steven Dunn ... Mo ... Flash Flanagan. In other words, some decent supporting players, but not much else.

Even now it's hard for fans to get that excited over the J.C. Ice-Bill Dundee father-son feud. Didn't that already happen a few years ago?

In September 1995, Bill was fired from the USWA for pulling a knife on Wolfie D. Last spring, he returned and convinced his son to turn his back on Wolfie. Fans supported Wolfie as he fought Ice and Dundee. Then Wolfie and J.C. made up, and Bill was back on the fans' side. It's hard for anyone to get excited about these guys when they change their loyalties every other month. It's so hard to identify with them. Even Lawler, once a Memphis hero, is losing his appeal. You could once count on him to take on any invader from the WWF or elsewhere, but in the last year, he has gone from fan favorite to rulebreaker to pseudo-fan favorite in the USWA.

It tells you something when not one of the 160 experts we surveyed for the "*PWI* Poll" this year said the USWA had the highest quality matches of any federation, not one picked the USWA's TV show as the best in wrestling, and just seven percent said the USWA was the top independent federation (down from 15 percent last year).

Bad days in Memphis? Indeed.

PILLMAN UPDATE

His face was on the cover of the November 1996 issue of *The Wrestler*. We predicted he'd be the man to unseat Shawn Michaels as WWF World champion. He was a big part of probably the most controversial *WWF Monday Night Raw* ever, as he became the first wrestler ever to pull a gun on *Raw*.

But now hardly anyone talks about Brian Pillman. He is the WWF's forgotten man.

I paid him a visit at his home in Kentucky in February, the same home that Steve Austin broke into last November only to find Pillman waiting with gun in hand.

I was shocked by some of the things I heard when I talked with him. No ranting and raving. He was actually calm, almost polite.

"Everything that happened to me over the last year ... it gave me the chance to think a lot," he said. "Maybe my life was moving too fast. Maybe I needed to slow things down."

I asked him how he felt about Steve Austin now that he had had three months to think about the gun incident.

"Steve's a lot like me," he said. "We're both real intense, probably too intense for our own good. Maybe I should have seen that blowup coming, but I wish it didn't happen like that. I don't mind shocking people, but that went too far."

Early last fall, Brian Pillman and Steve Austin were on good terms, but their relationship took a turn for the worse in November. Pillman, though still injured, hasn't forgotten about his old pal.

I asked him if he missed the spotlight, if he had been watching Austin carefully on TV.

"Yeah, I have an ego, so I like it when people talk about me, but Steve, well he's worked hard to get where he is. He deserves the success. If I could just get this thing workin' right, I'd be right there with him."

He pointed to his ankle that shattered last April 15 in a car accident. The same ankle that Austin broke again when he sneak-attacked Pillman at a WWF TV taping last fall.

Pillman told me the ankle was feeling a lot better, but that it'd be at least a few more months before he could start thinking about getting back into the ring. As I was leaving his home, he thanked me for coming and told me to call him anytime if I had more questions for him.

I was totally convinced he was a changed person until he left me with this parting shot: "And tell Austin if he thinks Bret Hart's been hard on him, he ain't seen nothing. That piece of garbage ..." He went on and on, making sure to throw in a few choice four-letter words here and there. When I left, I didn't know what to think of Pillman.

Which is just how he likes it. □

off the top rope

by Brandi Mankiewicz

If you wish to contribute to Brandi's mailbag, send your letters to:

TOP ROPE
Box 1148
Ft. Washington, PA 19034

Or send e-mail to:
TopRopePWI@aol.com

(Editor's note: The opinions expressed in this column are those of the letter writers and Brandi Mankiewicz herself. They do not necessarily reflect the editorial views of this magazine.)

THE HIP THING to do in wrestling right now is to turn bad. Thank the NWO for making rulebreaking chic again. Getting beaned by cups and wadded-up paper is welcome and desirable. Being beloved and respected is passe.

If you turn to page 38, you'll notice that I recently had the sheer displeasure of interviewing Savio Vega, the latest addition to Club Bedlam. For nearly two years, I've watched this yutz sashay around the ring to a Latino beat. I found him to be a great cure for insomnia. Now that this opportunist has given Ahmed Johnson top-rope burn and joined the Nation of (we want to be the NWO) Domination, he has become walking Nyquil in my eyes.

In this day and age, wrestlers change philosophies every time the wind shifts. Their fans wail and gnash their teeth in despair. But soon these men realize the error of their ways (or that they're getting no extra attention) and return to the fold of fan favoritism. Just look at Davey Boy Smith.

To me, Savio Vega will always be one huge yawn.

To you, my queendom, I remind you that I am your champion.

Dear Queen Brandi,

What am I to do? Shawn Michaels once again has possession of the WWF World title. I guess all I can do is wait until WrestleMania, when either Steve Austin, Bret Hart, or Vader kicks his butt back to San Antonio.

TOM ROBSON
TRobson724@aol.com
Philadelphia, PA

Hey, it wasn't my idea to interview Savio Vega in "Press Conference" in this issue, but I came up with the most interesting questions. Too bad he didn't have many interesting answers.

Dear Tom:

Be patient, my dear. World paper champion Yawn Michaels has proven to be all glitz and no guts. He crumbled to Sid, then grumbled over Bret Hart's mere presence. If it weren't for a wayward camera, he would still be an ex-champ. His change of attitude is more of a pouting fest, and I have seen way too many of those recently; I'm bored with it. The idea of this Chippendale wannabe leading the WWF is ridiculous. And since you were so proper in calling me "Queen," I will break precedent and print the other letter that you sent.

Dear Brandi:

I must congratulate you on taking over the "Off The Top Rope" column. I must, however, criticize the fact that you seem to be trying too hard to be like Dan Shocket and Eddie Ellner. One thing that made Ellner good was his consistency. He never showed a sign of remorse for people like Dusty Rhodes or Andre the Giant. I think that fan insulting is cool once in a while, but don't let it take over your obligation as a reporter.

MARIO A. GONZALEZ
salarrue@aol.com
Los Angeles, CA

Dear Mario:

Then what pleasure do I have in my professional life? Ripping into you trailer-park dwellers is what I live for, so keep your lame opinions to yourself. But all right then, in the tradition of Dan Shocket, I'll go after Andre and Dusty. Oh, wait, best leave Andre alone. Okay, big Dust, here's my question: What in blazes is a "belly welly"? Actually, Mario, I have singled out my own target in the current WWF champion, Yawn Michaels. Next?

Dear Brandi:

Goldust used to be my favorite wrestler until he started kissing people. Then I hated him. Now he is starting to climb back on my list of favorites. And another thing. Why doesn't Sid go to ECW? He would be good there. He has the power to beat some of the people there.

ANTHONY DiSANTIS
patti@waterw.com
Pennsville, NJ

Dear Anthony:

'Dust will never be the wrestler he used to be if he can't get over this obsession with defending Marlena's honor. As for your other question ... Sid in ECW, eh? Let me put it this way: 911 was a contender in ECW, and he had but one move, a chokeslam. Let's see, Sid is a psychotic brawler who will beat up old men with TV equipment. He'd blend in in ECW like Waldo in a kid's book. In fact, he might be even harder to find.

Poor Goldust ... destroyed by a woman. I can't fault him for falling under Marlena's spell, as many men have fallen under mine. But he has lost his edge in recent months.

Dear Brandi,

What do you think of the WWF's new *Shotgun Saturday Night* program? It seems to me that they are just grasping at straws to come up with a concept stolen from ECW. The fact that so few stations have picked up the show says something about interest in the WWF right now.

TOM ROBSON
TRobson@aol.com
Philadelphia, PA

Dear Tom:

If the concept is promoting wrestling in a building that has no business holding a ring, then ECW can keep that "concept." The claustrophobic conditions coupled with low ceilings make this concept a neckbreaker waiting to happen. However, what it may show is that ECW is setting some type of standard in wrestling. What that is ... I do not know. I guess we'll have to wait for their big pay-per-view in April.

The day when Hulk Hogan passes the NWO torch to Kevin Nash is coming very soon. Maybe "Hollywood" doesn't know it yet, but he had better get ready for it, because he won't be able to stop this powerhouse.

Dear Brandi,

Since Kevin Nash seems to be content doing Hulk Hogan's bidding and standing in his shadow, do you think that he will ever try to become the WCW World champion? It would be nice to see him make that exclusive list of people to win WWF and NWA/WCW world titles.

DMon123@aol.com
Wanaque, NJ

Dear DMon:

Yummy. My favorite subject. Nothing would accentuate that seven-foot frame better than the WCW World title belt. Kevin is filling his roles nicely right now as a tag team wrestler and Hogan understudy. Given time, he will grow weary of the backup role and want to start. Of course, that would mean a "Giant-like" turn away from his New World Order buddies. Frankly, I'd like to see him go back to the WWF, if for no other reason than to knock the fake crap out of "PseuDiesel." □

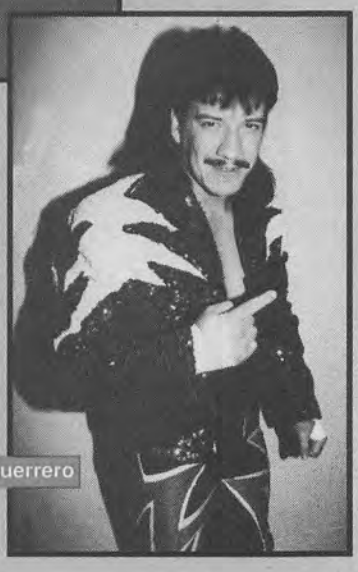
THE 1997 WRESTLING'S 50 HOTTEST QUESTIONS ANSWERED!

1. WHO IS, POUND-FOR-POUND, THE BEST WRESTLER IN THE WORLD?

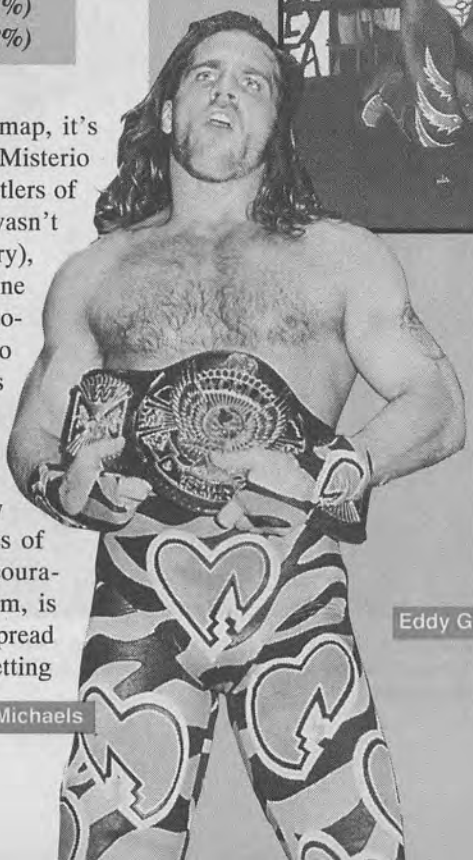
Rey Misterio Jr.	*17% (19%)*
Shawn Michaels	*16% (15%)*
Eddy Guerrero	*13% (4%)*
Mitsuharu Misawa	*12% (2%)*
Bret Hart	*12% (14%)*
Jushin Liger	*8% (2%)*
Dean Malenko	*6% (2%)*
Others	*16% (28%)*

Unless he completely falls off the wrestling map, it's going to be pretty difficult to displace Rey Misterio Jr., who at 140 pounds is one of the smallest wrestlers of all-time. Misterio, the high-flying wunderkind, wasn't even in the WCW top 10 at press time (knee injury), but has been such a force on the cruiserweight scene and such an exciting wrestler that's he's almost automatic in this category. Shawn Michaels, second two years running, gained ground late because of his WWF World title victory. Eddy Guerrero, the reigning WCW U.S. champion, is sometimes thought of as being smaller than he really is (221 pounds). Jushin Liger's return from brain surgery was one of wrestling's most heartwarming stories of 1996; pound-for-pound, he might be the most courageous. Mitsuharu Misawa, all 228 pounds of him, is All-Japan's Triple Crown champion. Votes were spread out in this category, with Dean Malenko barely getting enough to warrant mention.

Rey Misterio Jr.



Eddy Guerrero



Shawn Michaels

PWI POLL

*TAKE A LOOK inside ... that's what we try to do every year in what has become one of our most popular features: the "**PWI** Poll." What do the people inside wrestling think about the sport?*

Back in December, PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED mailed out 160 ballots (up 17 from last year). The ballots were sent to a cross-section of the sport's champions, contenders, and preliminary wrestlers; managers and referees; commissioners and presidents; promoters and matchmakers; journalists, TV announcers, and photographers; and anybody else "inside" the sport. They were asked to answer 50 questions pertaining to wrestling and the people within it. The answers provide a unique and important perspective on the sport. Numerous questions were repeated from last year, while some are new and vital to the sport today.

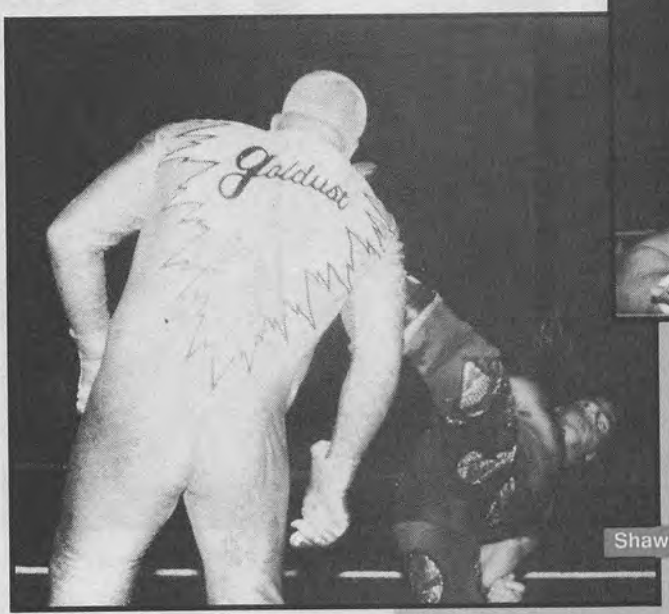
The poll was split into two parts. Part I consists of general and specific questions about the sport. Part II is our "Best Of The Best," in which insiders voted on who has the best of various finishing holds and maneuvers. Where applicable, numbers in parentheses reflect last year's results.

2. IF YOU COULD WATCH THE MATCHES OF ONLY ONE WRESTLER, WHOM WOULD YOU CHOOSE?

This question annually fascinates us because we don't tell our respondents whether the wrestler has to be active. But this year at least, our insiders chose all active wrestlers, which to us says good things about the state of wrestling. Shawn Michaels, the WWF World champion, edged out Sabu, last year's winner, although our insiders said they'd like to see Sabu wrestle more often in the United States. Rey Misterio is simply sensational, while Steve Austin and Chris Benoit are examples of technical excellence. Ric Flair dropped out. And, said one insider, "I'd like to see Hulk Hogan wrestle more often, simply because he's the WCW World champion."

Shawn Michaels	***22% (22%)***
Sabu	***20% (25%)***
Rey Misterio Jr.	***16% (2%)***
Steve Austin	***15% (2%)***
Chris Benoit	***11% (2%)***
Others	***16% (32%)***

Chris Benoit



Shawn Michaels

3. IF YOU COULD WATCH THE MATCHES OF ONLY ONE TAG TEAM, WHICH WOULD YOU CHOOSE?

Rick & Scott Steiner ..... *.28% (16%)*
The Road Warriors ..... *.17% (30%)*
The Midnight Express ..... *.14% (11%)*
Harlem Heat ..... *.9% (10%)*
The British Bulldogs ..... *.6% (7%)*
The Hart Foundation ..... *.5% (7%)*
The Eliminators ..... *.5% (0%)*
Others ..... *.16% (14%)*

It doesn't say much about the current state of tag team wrestling when, of the top seven teams, only five are active, and one of them, The Road Warriors, rarely wrestles together. Or perhaps it says something about the ever-changing composition of the teams. Doesn't anybody stay together anymore? "I can't keep track," wrote one insider. "I mean, look at [Kevin] Nash and [Scott] Hall. They weren't even together a year ago, and they probably won't be together a year from now. Years ago, tag teams were established. They stayed together." Several current tag teams, such as PG-13, Public Enemy, and The Nasty Boys, also received votes. But so did teams of the past, such as the Von Erichs, The Freebirds, and The Kangaroos.

4. WHO WOULD WIN A MATCH BETWEEN HULK AND SHAWN MICHAELS?

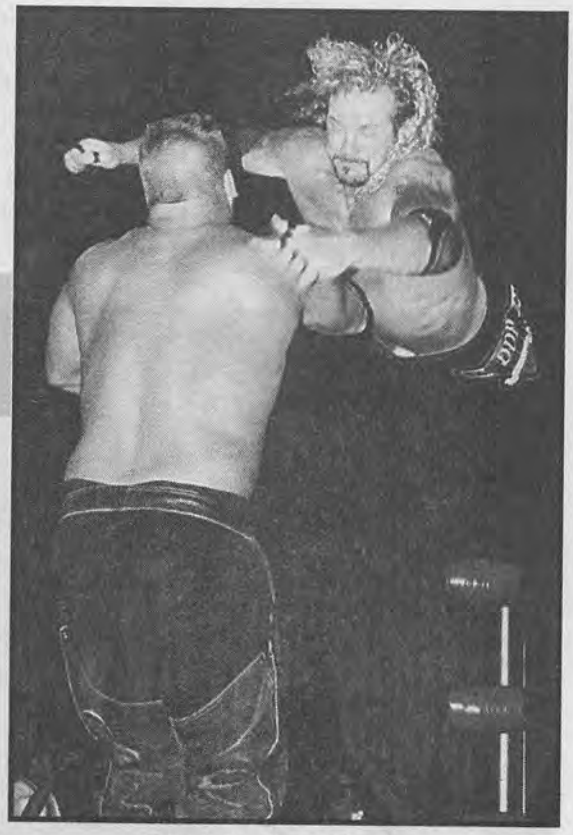
Shawn Michaels ..... *.65%*
Hulk Hogan ..... *.35%*

Last year, WWF World champion **Bret Hart** defeated WCW World champion **Ric Flair** in our annual matchup of the press time WCW and WWF champions. This year, **Hulk Hogan**—who in 1995 won by a huge margin over **Kevin "Diesel" Nash**—fell short, although several **Shawn Michaels** supporters pointed out that "Hollywood" often finds a way to win when he shouldn't.

5. WHICH NORTH AMERICAN FEDERATION HAS THE HIGHEST QUALITY WRESTLING?

WCW ..... *.47% (48%)*
WWF ..... *.37% (39%)*
ECW ..... *.16% (11%)*

Interestingly, as WCW gains grounds in the popularity and television wars, it's losing ground to the WWF in the quality wars. WCW won for the fifth consecutive year—dominance approaching that of the NFC in the Super Bowl—but it's mandate is about as clear as Bill Clinton: In other words, it has none. This question focuses on quality of wrestling, not TV, glitz, glamour, or arena lighting, areas in which WCW has finally caught up to (and maybe even passed) the WWF. But at least one WCW detractor pointed out that the federation has become "more talk and less action." ECW, with Raven, The Sandman, Shane Douglas, Tommy Dreamer, The Eliminators, Chris Candido, and Sabu, moved up a bit, while the USWA received no votes: Is the quality in any North American federation high enough?



DDP clotheslines Mike Enos

Flair is WCW all the way

Ahmed Johnson with WWF head Vince McMahon

6. WHICH IS THE PREMIER FEDERATION IN NORTH AMERICA?

WCW	*60% (58%)*
WWF	*37% (40%)*
ECW	*3% (0%)*

The question refers to both the overall package and public perception and, in both cases, the WCW has grown by leaps and bounds over the past decade, surpassing the WWF when at one time it seemed a lost cause. *WCW Monday Nitro* has surpassed *Monday Night Raw* as the premier wrestling program and, although WCW's pay-per-views often fall short of their promise, the New World Order controversy has drawn attention and added excitement. For many people, however, what sets apart WCW is its unique mix: the NWO and The Four Horsemen, brawlers such as Hulk Hogan, Lex Luger, and The Giant, talented technicians such as Six, Rey Misterio Jr., Dean Malenko, Eddy Guerrero, Dallas Page, Jeff Jarrett, and Chris Benoit. The WWF talent pool seems to have become stagnant and, said one respondent, "Nothing new ever seems to happen." Wrote another respondent: "It seems as if more and more, I'm more interested in what's happening in WCW than in the WWF. And when I look around on the streets, I'm seeing a lot of NWO and WCW paraphernalia when once I only saw WWF stuff. The sport has changed."

7. WOULD YOU DESCRIBE WRESTLING'S IMMEDIATE FUTURE AS HOPELESS, CLOUDY, STATUS QUO, PROMISING, OR SHINING?

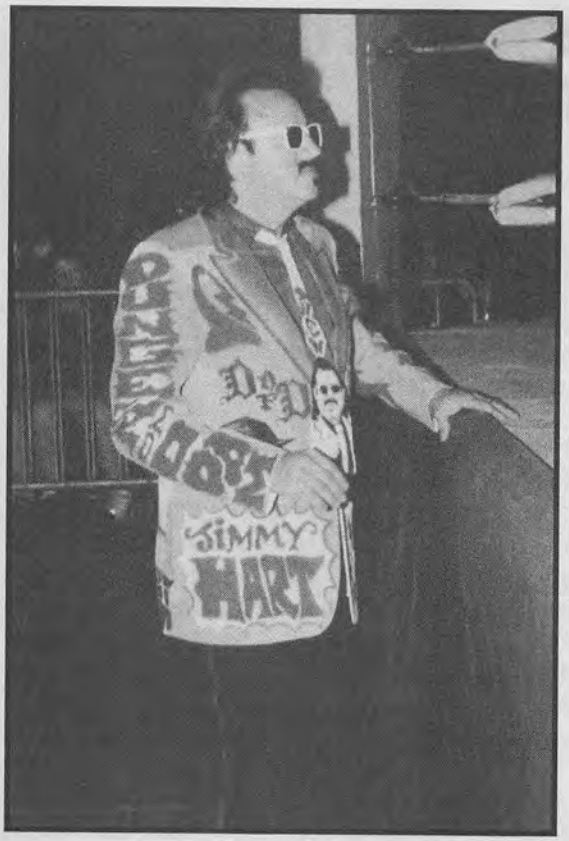
Promising	*42% (34%)*
Status quo	*25% (38%)*
Cloudy	*17% (20%)*
Shining	*16% (7%)*
Hopeless	*0% (1%)*

As the old song goes, "When skies are cloudy and gray, they're only gray for a day ..." Wrestling has blue skies, as evidenced by the results of this annual question. Last year, following the demise of Smoky Mountain Wrestling, status quo was a narrow winner over promising, with the pessimists—cloudy—far outpolling the optimists—shining. Not this year. Attendance is up in most cities, pay-per-view rates are solid, and Monday night ratings are better than ever. Wrestling was rarely in the negative spotlight in 1997, and there have been signs that the mainstream public—the group responsible for wrestling's boom in the mid-1980s—are fascinated by the NWO vs. WCW war (seen a lot of NWO T-shirts lately?). Meanwhile, ECW and the USWA continue to hold on to a respectable share of the market.

8. WHO REALLY RULES MONDAY NIGHTS?

WCW's *Monday Nitro* became such a powerful player in the Monday night wars that it forced the WWF to move the starting time of Raw an hour earlier. But, nonetheless, *Nitro* usually provides plenty of NWO-related controversy and confrontations, and even some newcomers. WCW, the latecomer in this war, has pulled far ahead of the WWF in the ratings.

WCW	*63% (48%)*
WWF	*33% (43%)*
Even/not sure	*4% (5%)*



Jimmy Hart

9. WHO IS WRESTLING'S BEST MANAGER?

Jimmy Hart	*35% (43%)*
Ted DiBiase	*30% (4%)*
Clarence Mason	*13% (0%)*
Sherri Martel	*8% (6%)*
Jim Cornette	*8% (40%)*
Others	*6% (2%)*

Here's the question many of our insiders asked us: "Is Eric Bischoff a manager?" Wrote one insider: "He certainly acts like one, even though he's an official WCW vice president. Well, if he's a manager, then he gets my vote, if not, give it to ..." In most cases, they said give it to Jimmy Hart, who continues to be a major player in WCW and has helped the Dungeon of Doom remain strong, or Ted DiBiase, one of the ringleaders of the New World Order. Sherri Martel has worked wonders for Harlem Heat, while Jim Cornette received support even though he's mostly out of the managerial picture. Good support for Clarence Mason, whose Nation of Domination is quickly becoming a force in the WWF. Look for Mason to be a major player over the next few years. And whatever happened to Paul Bearer?

10. WHO IS WRESTLING'S SEXIEST WOMAN?

Kimberly	*36% (2%)*
Sunny	*32% (47%)*
Marlena	*9% (2%)*
Debra McMichael	*7% (0%)*
Beulah McGillicutty	*6% (19%)*
Francine	*5% (0%)*
Others	*5% (5%)*

She's not doing much these days after a short run with The Booty Man as The Booty Babe, but reports are that Kimberly is on her way back, and that's only good news for her legion of fans. "Word is that she's coming back to 'Diamond' Dallas Page, which just goes to show what an understanding, forgiving person she is. Beautiful, too," wrote one insider. Sunny also isn't doing much these days, but she's the queen of the Internet downloads; her pictures are hot stuff! Debra McMichael would look better, one insider wrote, "if she didn't sound like such a phony." Dwindling support for Beulah McGillicutty, which surprised us, and increased support for Marlena, which surprised us, too.

Kimberly

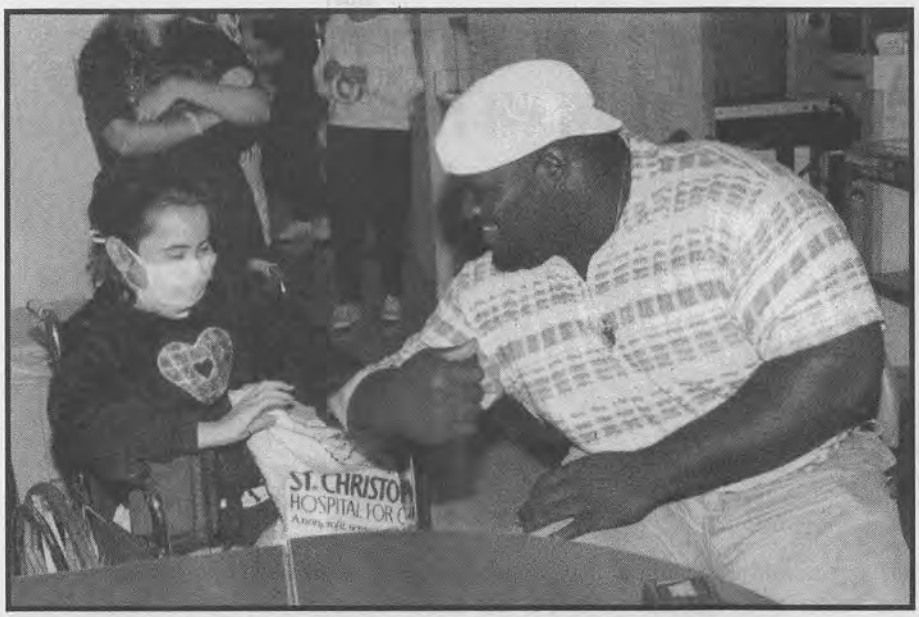
11. WHO IS THE BEST TELEVISION COMMENTATOR IN WRESTLING?

Jim Ross	*23% (8%)*
Mike Tenay	*19% (0%)*
Jerry Lawler	*18% (25%)*
Joey Styles	*16% (23%)*
Tony Schiavone	*10% (7%)*
Bobby Heenan	*9% (12%)*
Others	*5% (14%)*

Wrestling commentary has become so partisan that the idea of the unbiased analyst has become a thing of the past. But Jim Ross' knowledge of the sport and network of connections often make up for his lack of color. He's a good reason to watch WWF broadcasts. Mike Tenay, a WCW newcomer, has become a good reason to watch the second half of *Monday Nitro*. Tenay sees things others miss, and his knowledge of the Lucha Libre style is unsurpassed. Jerry Lawler's wit and style make it possible for us to overlook his bias toward rulebreakers. "He's hilarious," wrote one insider. "At this point, I think Lawler's a better commentator than he is a wrestler." Sometimes it's hard to figure out whose side Bobby Heenan is on. "But you know that he hates Hulk Hogan and Eric Bischoff," wrote one insider. "That's consistent." Joey Styles, ECW's blow-by-blow man, still has plenty of supporters.

Jim Ross

12. WOULD YOU DESCRIBE MAINSTREAM MEDIA COVERAGE OF WRESTLING AS POOR, MEDIOCRE, GOOD, OR EXCELLENT?



Mark Henry helped improve the public's perception of wrestling

Poor	*92% (90%)*
Mediocre	*8% (10%)*

Hulk Hogan, Shawn Michaels, and Sunny made the rounds on talk shows over the past year, but that was about it for mainstream media coverage in a year that saw the USA Network and TNT in a real ratings battle involving wrestling. Shawn Michaels wasn't attacked, and networks, mainstream magazines, and newspapers basically turned a blind eye to pro wrestling. Well, that's okay: In non-Olympic years, most of the mainstream media ignore figure skating, too, and that's one of the most popular sports in North America.

13. WOULD YOU GAUGE THE GENERAL PUBLIC'S PERCEPTION OF WRESTLING AS POOR, MEDIOCRE, GOOD, OR EXCELLENT?

Mediocre ..... *.34% (38%)*
Poor ..... *.33% (37%)*
Good ..... *.28% (18%)*
Excellent ..... *.5% (7%)*

Good gained ground, while mediocre and poor lost ground in this annual question. Excellent lost a few points, but all in all, our insiders felt the public is warming up to our sport. The thinking on this question was pretty basic. "A lot more people are watching wrestling on Monday nights than ever before," wrote one insider. "They're discovering an exciting, multifaceted sport with interesting personalities and great athletes." Wrote another insider: "In all other sports, all you ever hear about are rising salaries and ticket prices. When was the last time you heard about a salary dispute in wrestling? Sure, they happen, but in wrestling, we don't wash our dirty laundry in public."

14. WHO IS THE MOST INFLUENTIAL MAN IN WRESTLING?

The balance of federation power has shifted in wrestling ... from the WWF (McMahon) to WCW (Turner) and, now, to the New World Order (Bischoff and Hogan). By attracting some of the biggest names in the sport, the NWO has exerted tremendous influence on WCW, its parent federation, and all of wrestling. So the vote was split between the two NWO kingpins: WCW Senior Vice President Eric Bischoff and WCW World champion Hulk Hogan, who by his very presence can attract the big names. So Turner lost some ground and McMahon did, too. "It seems whenever people come up to me, they always want to know what's going on with the NWO," wrote one journalistic insider. "Not WCW, not the WWF, but the NWO. For better or worse, it's all people are talking about."

Eric Bischoff ..... *.34% (12%)*
Hulk Hogan ..... *.31% (44%)*
Vince McMahon ..... *.26% (24%)*
Ted Turner ..... *.9% (20%)*

Eric Bischoff

15. WHICH IS THE BEST WRESTLING SHOW ON TV, PAY-PER-VIEW, CABLE, OR OTHERWISE?

Two hours of live, free wrestling every Monday night? It's hard to argue with that package, especially when the wrestlers featured include Hulk Hogan, The Giant, Eddy Guerrero, Rey Misterio Jr., Lex Luger, Ric Flair, Dallas Page, Chris Benoit, Sting, and others. *WCW Monday Nitro* has suddenly become the standard by which all others are judged. And did we mention ... it's free? The WWF's Royal Rumble retained strong support because of its unique format: The winner of the main event gets a shot at the World title at WrestleMania. Year after year, it's the best PPV on the wrestling schedule. *Raw* lost ground because, as one insider side, "given the choice, most people watch *Nitro* because it has more energy."

WCW Monday Nitro ..... *.40% (12%)*
WWF Monday Night Raw ..... *.19% (12%)*
WWF's Royal Rumble ..... *.15% (19%)*
WWF's WrestleMania ..... *.10% (14%)*
WCW's Starrcade ..... *.6% (16%)*
ECW's weekly show ..... *.6% (1%)*
Others ..... *.4% (18%)*

16. WHICH IS THE MOST IMPORTANT CHAMPIONSHIP IN NORTH AMERICA?

WWF World.....54% (52%)
WCW World.....46% (48%)

Here's one annual question that has nothing to do with which federation is hotter, whose TV show is better, or who held the belt in the past. All that counts is the quality of the champion and the contenders; that's how any world title must be judged. And, for now, with Sid Vicious coming off a title reign and Shawn Michaels in control—with Steve Austin, Bret Hart, The Undertaker, Big Van Vader, and Sid hot in pursuit—the WWF title is simply more meaningful. "Maybe Hulk Hogan can lend the WCW belt a helping hand by defending it once in a while," wrote one insider. "What he has done to that belt is an absolute disgrace. Ric Flair used to defend the title two or three times a week. Doesn't Hogan have any respect?" Guess not, so respect for the belt he holds takes a downward turn, too.

17. IS WRESTLING BETTER OR WORSE THAN IT WAS FIVE YEARS AGO?

Remember when? Well, our insiders did, and they say there's no doubt wrestling is in better shape now than it was five years ago. "Just think about where the sport was in 1992," wrote one insider. "WCW was running a distant second to the WWF in terms of popularity, ECW was just starting up, Ron Simmons was the WCW World champion, and nobody knew what Hulk Hogan was up to. Now we have the WWF and WCW battling each other for a share of the market, and competition has improved the product." Wrote another insider, "People are talking about wrestling again." Some respondents lamented the quality of the tag team picture, with few outstanding tag teams gracing the top 10, while some in the glass-is-half-empty crowd feared that the NWO vs. WCW war will destroy the federation. "But even though there are fewer strong independents than in the past, the ones existing are holding their own," wrote another insider. "That's good news for the sport."

Better 81% (61%)
Worse 19% (39%)

Many think Shawn has made wrestling better

18. WHO IS THE MOST UNDERRATED WRESTLER IN THE WORLD?

Dean Malenko 17% (7%)
Chris Benoit 15% (3%)
"Diamond" Dallas Page 14% (0%)
Eddy Guerrero 7% (11%)
Hunter Hearst Helmsley 6% (0%)
Chris Candido 5% (1%)
Others 36% (47%)

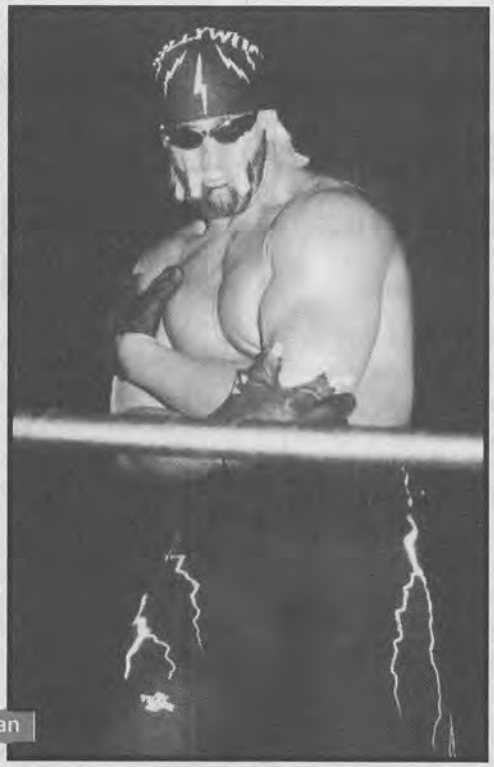
More than 40 wrestlers received votes in this category, and there was no clear-cut winner. Dean Malenko, the man insiders respect but too many people still don't know, won by a slight margin over Chris Benoit, the most overlooked member of The Four Horsemen. "Malenko's one of the best wrestlers in WCW," one insider wrote. As for Benoit, "All everybody ever talks about is Ric Flair and Arn Anderson," wrote an insider. "But Benoit's the best of the Horsemen." Dallas Page, once at the depths of the sport—morally and financially bankrupt—hoisted himself up over the past year. As for the Chris Candido votes: "He might be the top wrestler in ECW," one insider wrote. "He could beat anyone there."

Dean Malenko

19. WHO IS THE MOST OVERRATED WRESTLER IN THE WORLD?

Hulk Hogan	*38% (6%)*
Big Van Vader	*25% (1%)*
Sid Vicious	*14% (30%)*
Lex Luger	*8% (40%)*
Others	*15% (7%)*

Amazing ... Hulk Hogan wins the WCW World title, and yet our insiders say he's the most overrated wrestler in the world. Why? "Because he doesn't wrestle," wrote one insider. "Calling him an overrated wrestler is probably a misnomer. And how about his performance at Starrcade? The man has lost it, and only the NWO is keeping him going." Wrote one insider about Big Van Vader, "Physically, he's getting bigger and bigger, but in wrestling stature, he's getting smaller and smaller. I hope Paul Bearer can help him." Lex Luger, who "won" this question last year, dropped to fourth; he had a very good year, but some insiders still give him no respect.



Hulk Hogan

20. WHO IS WRESTLING'S WILDEST DAREDEVIL?

Increasing support for defending champion Rey Misterio Jr., who brings a 140-pound package into the ring and never ceases to amaze with his daring aerial acts, achieving heights previously thought impossible. But his greatest act of daring, according to one insider, "is stepping into the ring at all and taking on men twice his size. The kid has guts." So does Sabu, who never saw a table he didn't want to break. Jushin Liger stared down the odds and returned from brain surgery, while Shawn Michaels has also ignored doctors' orders to return to the ring. These men are medical daredevils, too!

Rey Misterio Jr	*53% (42%)*
Sabu	*22% (35%)*
Jushin Liger	*15% (5%)*
Shawn Michaels	*5% (2%)*
Others	*5% (18%)*

Sid clotheslines Bret

21. WHO IS WRESTLING'S BEST BRAWLER?

Sid Vicious	*36% (0%)*
The Giant	*28% (10%)*
The Undertaker	*16% (17%)*
Mankind	*9% (8%)*
The Sandman	*6% (0%)*
Others	*5% (7%)*

It was a big year for "Psycho" Sid Vicious, who won his first WWF World title and shed the label "underachiever" forever. The Giant also won his first WCW World title—lost it, too—and dominated Hulk Hogan in a few matches. The Undertaker remains virtually unbeatable. Mankind, the former Cactus Jack, is absolutely fearless. The Sandman, an ex-ECW champion, is the king of the best brawling federation in the world.

22. WHICH IS WRESTLING'S BEST BRAWLING TAG TEAM?

Scott Hall & Kevin Nash	*37% (0%)*
Harlem Heat	*19% (0%)*
The Nasty Boys	*18% (41%)*
The Gangstas	*13% (11%)*
The Eliminators	*5% (0%)*
Others	*8% (2%)*

Where were they a year ago? Well, they were in the WWF as Diesel and Razor Ramon. But The Outsiders stormed WCW, spawned the New World Order, and then finished their raid by winning the WCW World tag team title. Pretty impressive for a team that wasn't even together at the time of our last poll. To many people, brawling now means streetfighting, and that's what Harlem Heat, The Nasty Boys, The Gangstas, and The Eliminators can be all about. Manager Sherri Martel has revitalized Harlem Heat, while The Nasty Boys continue to set a standard for nasty mayhem. But what's most impressive about Hall and Nash is their size, one insider wrote. "They keep coming at you, and one's bigger than the next. They've taken tag team wrestling to new heights."

23. WHICH IS THE BEST INDEPENDENT FEDERATION IN NORTH AMERICA?

There are dozens of independents, most of which continue to provide a high quality of wrestling to their regional audiences. But ECW has firmly entrenched itself as the third most important federation in North America, mostly because its telecasts are seen by so many on cable. The quality of wrestling is high, the action is intense and exciting, the wrestlers are top-notch, and the fans get into every match. "They started out by establishing a cult following, and now the cult is spreading," Perhaps fans are turning to ECW for something different. And its roster of wrestlers, including Raven, The Sandman, Shane Douglas, Tommy Dreamer, Chris Candido, and Terry Funk, is nothing to sneeze at. That's not a knock against the USWA, which continues to hold a fair share of the independent market. "USWA is a decent federation, partly because Jerry Lawler is so committed to its cause," wrote one insider. "But it's very regional in scope."

ECW	*89% (62%)*
USWA	*7% (15%)*
Others	*4% (9%)*

24. WHO GIVES THE BEST INTERVIEWS?

Steve Austin	*17% (0%)*
Mankind	*16% (19%)*
Arn Anderson	*15% (0%)*
Ric Flair	*14% (2%)*
Shawn Michaels	*13% (3%)*
Others	*25% (13%)*

Are you aware that there are some wrestling fans—if you want to call them that—who watch wrestling for the interviews and tune out during the matches? And that others won't attend live shows because they don't want to miss out on the interviews. Perhaps these are the same people who spend a fortune on 1-900 numbers and clog the chat rooms every time a wrestler is on AOL. But it goes to show how important interviews are to wrestling. They serve to send a message, and to intimidate. Looking for reasons for Steve Austin's rise to WWF fame? "He was always a fine wrestler, but now he's a good interviewee, too," wrote one insider. "He comes across as much more forceful and confident. Last year at King of the Ring, he asserted his intentions of becoming the dominant wrestler in the WWF, and he's on his way." Mankind continues to give raving, colorful interviews. Arn Anderson, the veteran, gets his point across. Ric Flair has always known how to speak into a microphone. And Shawn Michaels gets across his message with style. Big Van Vader dropped out after winning in 1995 and placing second last year.

25. WHICH IS THE BEST SPECIALTY MATCH?

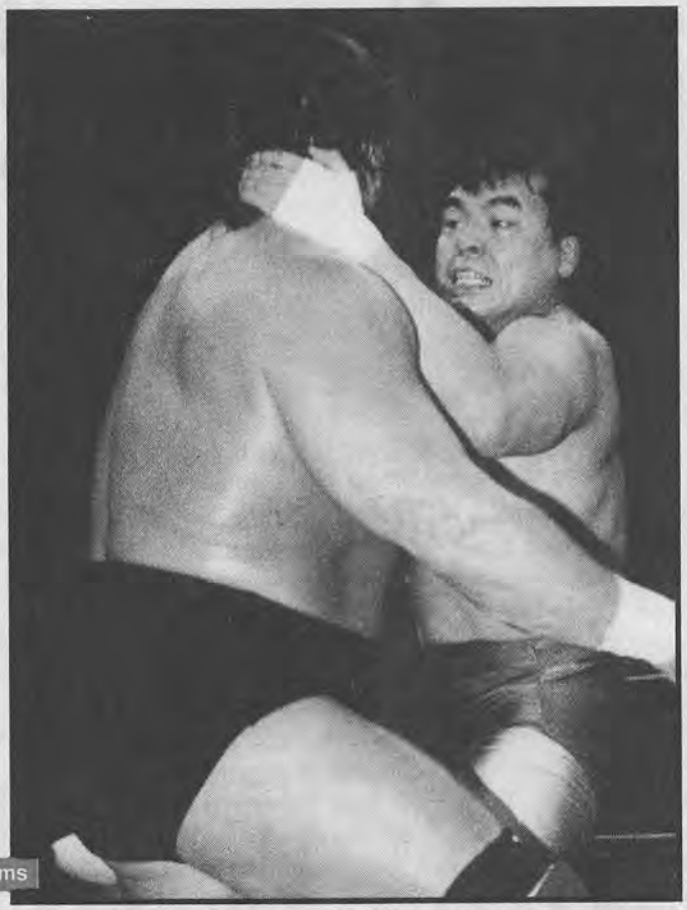
Falls-count-anywhere	*32% (35%)*
Steel cage	*17% (15%)*
Royal Rumble	*12% (2%)*
Ladder	*10% (14%)*
Chain	*9% (13%)*
Others	*20% (23%)*

"Still asking this stupid question?" one insider wrote. "Specialty matches are not appreciated within the sport. The only matches that mean anything are one-on-one and tag teams. Anything else promotes violence." Okay, just thought we'd ask. Falls-count-anywhere wins again, mostly because of the unpredictable nature of that type of bout. Just ask Kevin Sullivan and Chris Benoit.

26. WHO IS THE BEST FOREIGN WRESTLER?

Mitsuharu Misawa 56% (24%)
Jushin Liger 14% (7%)
Shinya Hashimoto 8% (2%)
Konnan 5% (0%)
Others 17% (12%)

Overwhelming support for All-Japan Triple Crown champion Mitsuharu Misawa, who wins for the second year in a row, this time garnering more than three times as many votes as his nearest competitor. Misawa is one of the top wrestlers in the world. Jushin Liger rebounded from brain surgery to have an outstanding year. IWGP champ Hashimoto is one of the least-known Japanese wrestlers among North American fans. Konnan rose rapidly in WCW. And what about Rey Misterio Jr.? "He's not a foreigner," wrote one insider. "You guys made a mistake last year. He's from San Diego." Sorry, guys, but we didn't make the mistake. Our insiders did. We just printed their responses.



Misawa vs. Steve Williams

27. WILL 1997 BE HULK HOGAN'S FINAL YEAR IN WRESTLING?

The lesson of Hulk Hogan and retirement is pretty simple, as stated by one of our insiders. "He isn't gone until he's gone. Sure, he doesn't wrestle much anymore, but he is the WCW World champion and the main player in the NWO. I think it should be pretty obvious to everyone that Hogan will always be around wrestling in some form and that he isn't going away." Perhaps a better question is whether 1997 *should* be Hogan's final year in wrestling. He keeps leaving and coming back, and each time he comes back, he adds to his legend. Now he's a rulebreaker. Will the next incarnation of "Hollywood" be repentant fan favorite?

No 73% (59%)
Yes 25% (39%)
Unsure 2% (2%)

28. WHICH WRESTLER WILL BE THE NEXT TO JUMP FEDERATIONS?

Hulk Hogan 13%
Shawn Michaels 12%
Sting 11%
Big Van Vader 9%
Lex Luger 9%
The Giant 7%
The Undertaker 6%
Others 33%

As you can tell by the way this question was worded, it's not a matter of whether any more wrestlers will jump federations. It's a question of who will be the next to make the move. And you might say that we didn't really get an answer to this question; rather, we got a collection of opinions with no clear-cut conclusion. Hogan is a main candidate because of his previous relations with the WWF and because, as one insider wrote, "he's already on the outs with WCW fans. If he wants to resurrect his image, he'll have to do it in the WWF. He didn't turn against those fans." Shawn Michaels was a popular choice simply because he's the WWF's top celebrity and Ted Turner has targeted the WWF's top men. Sting might want to get away from the questions about whether he's going to join the NWO. Vader needs a career boost. Luger likes moving around. The Giant "might want to follow in the footsteps of Andre the Giant," wrote an insider. Twenty-nine wrestlers were named on ballots.

29. CAN THE NWO OVERTAKE WCW?

No ..... *.64%*
Yes ..... *.26%*
Unsure ..... *.10%*

Every year, there are a few questions that don't please our insiders. This was one of them. "What in the world are you guys talking about?" wrote an insider in promotions. "How can the NWO overtake WCW? The NWO is essentially part of WCW, and Ted Turner has enough money to squash any NWO rebellion. The only reason the NWO exists is because Turner lets it. Come to grips, men!"

Will Hogan and NWO rule?

30. ARE THERE TOO MANY WRESTLING PAY-PER-VIEWS?

Yes ..... *.64%*
No ..... *.6%*

Starrcade ... WrestleMania ... SuperBrawl ... Royal Rumble ... Uncensored ... King of the Ring ... Bash at the Beach ... Survivor Series ... The Great American Bash ... SummerSlam ... NWO Souled Out ... In Your House, again and again. And now ECW on pay-per-view. These days, following wrestling requires an addressable cable convertor and a pocketful of cash. It's expensive to follow the sport, and our insiders fear that WCW and WWF are overpricing their most loyal fans. "There comes a point when you have to say that enough is enough," wrote one respondent. "Most wrestling fans have middle-class incomes, and they just can't afford to shell out $29.95 twice a month on top of their regular cable bills. But if you want to follow the sport, that's the price you have to pay." Not so, said our insiders who feel there aren't too many PPVs. "Twenty years ago, everything important happened at the live cards, and they weren't televised. Nothing happened on the TV shows. Now at least the true fan has the opportunity to see every big event. I think some people have short memories."

31. SHOULD ECW GET WORLD TITLE STATUS?

Yes ..... *.51%*
No ..... *.44%*
Unsure ..... *.5%*

Of course, we're referring to our idea of a world title. Many federations refer to their heavyweight championships as world titles, but only the WWF and WCW belts are worthy of PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED'S designation. The AWA heavyweight title was also recognized as a world title until the federation folded. Since then, there have been only two world titles, and few federations have made bids for recognition. ECW is growing in stature and popularity, and although its talent roster can't equal that of WCW or the WWF, a nudge from *PWI* could put the federation over the top. Should we give it that nudge? We say no, and these results will not change our opinion. The lack of a national cable-TV contract and the fact that ECW only runs shows in a few states is enough for us to hold back. Our insiders were split, and the "unsure" vote could have decided the vote either way. For now, we're going to wait a little longer and see.

ECW champ Raven

32. WHO IS THE MOST DANGEROUS WRESTLER?

The Giant ..... *.59%*
Steve Austin ..... *.17%*
Sid Vicious ..... *.6%*
Big Van Vader ..... *.5%*
Others ..... *.13%*

At 7'4", 430 pounds, no wrestler in the world is more intimidating looking than The Giant. And with his impressive chokeslam, in which he lifts an opponent by the throat and slams him to the mat, no wrestler has greater potential to cripple anyone who crosses his path. Add to that a killer instinct like few seen before and you have the most dangerous package in the world. "He's getting meaner, too," wrote one insider. "He knows the difference between the best wrestlers in the world and the underachievers is that little intangible known as killer instinct, and The Giant is nurturing his." Steve Austin's "Stone-Cold stunner" also has crippling potential, but it's his unpredictable nature that makes him dangerous.

33. SHOULD THE WWF MOVE *RAW* TO ANOTHER NIGHT?

We were shocked by the overwhelming response of our insiders; we figured they'd be split on the question. But obviously they've been paying attention to the ratings and the WWF's seemingly futile attempt to hold on to a reasonable share of the Monday night market. *Nitro* is kicking some serious butt, and the gap is only getting larger. "I've always thought it was counterproductive for them to go head-to-head," wrote one insider. "What's the point? Why force wrestling fans into making a decision? Besides, what's so special about Monday night? The WWF can have Tuesday or Sunday night to itself, or maybe even Friday night. As long as they avoid Must See TV Thursday on NBC, they're fine."

Yes *79%*
No *21%*

34. CAN WOMEN'S WRESTLING THRIVE AGAIN IN THE U.S.?

No *78%*
Yes *22%*

Attempts by Madusa, Sherri Martel, Luna Vachon, Magnificent Mimi, and others to revive the sport in the U.S. over the past 10 years have been dismal failures. The Gorgeous Ladies of Wrestling flaunted their stuff in skimpy outfits, yet they still had trouble drawing a crowd. In the 1950s and '60s, fans were fascinated by women's wrestling: *Hey,* they thought, *women aren't supposed to do that kind of thing.* But so few outstanding female athletes choose wrestling as their sport that stars such as Madusa and Sherri were able to dominate, and that makes for bad entertainment. "From what I've seen," wrote one promoter, "there's no interest in women's wrestling. There simply isn't a call for that sort of thing."

Malia Hosaka vs. Debbie Combs

35. SHOULD WRESTLING GET A PG-14 RATING?

The new TV ratings system has caused some confusion. Most sports are being rated G. Wrestling, because of its inherent violence, is getting a PG rating. But is PG-14 more appropriate, considering the ultraviolent nature of some matches, and the way certain wrestlers can't help but slip a sexual innuendo or two into their interviews? "It wouldn't be a bad idea," wrote one insider. "Besides, look at the movies. Producers and directors do everything they can to get an R rating because that's the kind of stuff people want to see. It titillates them. I don't know if wrestling should get a PG-14 rating, but it couldn't hurt from a promotional standpoint." Wrote one of the no-voters: "What does it matter? Nobody's going to stop watching wrestling because of the rating."

Yes *54%*
No *40%*
Unsure *6%*

Maivia powerslams Goldust

36. WHO IS THE MOST PROMISING YOUNG STAR?

Rocky Maivia *34%*
Chris Jericho *29%*
Stevie Richards *7%*
Others *30%*

Third-generation star Rocky Maivia has gained quite a name for himself over the past year and looks like a champion of the future. These days, Maivia is feuding with Savio Vega and taking on the Nation of Domination. "The kid has guts, and that's an important thing for a young wrestler," wrote one insider. "If they don't have guts, they don't get anywhere." Chris Jericho is exciting fans in WCW after a whirl on the independent circuit and in Japan. Stevie Richards could be wearing ECW gold one of these days. Nineteen different wrestlers received votes in this category.

37. IS WRESTLING GANG VIOLENCE GETTING OUT OF HAND?

Yes *51%*
No *49%*

WCW has the New World Order, Four Horsemen, and Dungeon of Doom. The WWF has the Nation of Domination. So does the USWA. ECW has the Triple Threat. What ever happened to good ol' *mano-a-mano* wrestling? Has the old credo about there being power in numbers become wrestling's mantra? And aren't these gang attacks getting out of hand? Well, yes and no. "There's a major problem when a group threatens to overpower an entire organization," wrote one insider. "Then you have gang or street rules, where fear becomes the overwhelming weapon and everybody's afraid to question the way things are." But, wrote another insider, "Wrestling has always had these cliques. Now we call them gangs, but what's the difference between the NWO and The Four Horsemen or The Freebirds?"

38. GIVE A LETTER GRADE TO WWF PRESIDENT GORILLA MONSOON FOR HIS JOB PERFORMANCE: A, B, C, D, OR F

C ..... *38% (3%)*
B ..... *33% (17%)*
A ..... *12% (30%)*
D ..... *12% (32%)*
F ..... *5% (18%)*

Last year, the WWF president was viewed as being biased toward fan favorites and making decisions that seemingly were in the best interests of the WWF bank account. Not anymore. Although Monsoon didn't receive overwhelming vote of approval, he certainly has improved big-time since last year, when 50 percent of our insiders gave him a D or F. This year, 83 percent gave him a grade of C or above. "He's grown into his job," wrote one insider. "Gorilla finally seems to have realized that he's not running in a popularity contest, and he can't follow the fans, because they have their own agenda, too. He used to flip-flop. Now he's making sound decisions, and his ruling on the Royal Rumble was a perfect example of that." But 1997 will be an important year for Monsoon, wrote one insider. "Let's see how he handles the Nation of Domination. It's imperative that the NOD doesn't become another NWO, and only Monsoon can prevent that. He has the power."

40. WILL THE FOX NETWORK OR ANY OTHER NATIONAL OVER-THE-AIR NETWORK AIR A REGULAR WRESTLING PROGRAM WITHIN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS?

Close call in our first asking of this question. We chose Fox because its style and appeal to younger viewers makes it a natural to air a regular prime-time wrestling program. Fox has already added pizzazz to NFL and NHL telecasts, and it could certainly lend some punch and color to the mat sport. "It's an interesting question," wrote one insider whose expertise is in broadcasting. "Fox could do great things for the sport, and I wouldn't be surprised if Rupert Murdoch wasn't looking for another way to maybe needle Ted Turner. Murdoch clearly has the more powerful broadcast medium in Fox over TBS or TNT, and he might be a wrestling enthusiast." Wrote one of the no voters: "It's a pipe dream. Even the NHL had a hard time getting on the networks. Baseball is fading fast. What makes anyone think the networks want any part of wrestling?"

Yes *51%*
No *49%*

39. GIVE A LETTER GRADE TO WCW SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT ERIC BISCHOFF FOR HIS JOB PERFORMANCE: A, B, C, D, OR F

Pretty amazing, isn't it? What a condemnation of Bischoff's performance as the main man in WCW! But does anyone think Bischoff cares? Of course he doesn't. That's because Bischoff is more concerned with his role in the New World Order, which he flaunts despite his job description as the man in charge of keeping order in WCW. "Bischoff has thrown away any front of impartiality," wrote one insider. "He is clearly biased in favor of the NWO, and every decision he makes is favorable to the NWO. It's amazing that Bischoff has been allowed to keep his job. I guess it's because WCW's TV ratings are so great and because he brought so much great talent to WCW before he went NWO."

F *77%*
D *9%*
C *7%*
B *4%*
A *3%*

FINISHING IT OFF: WHO HAS THE BEST OF THE BEST?

This is our third "Best Of The Best" poll, a comprehensive study of wrestling's most awesome finishing holds/moves and the men who use them. We asked our respondents to base their judgment on how often a wrestler's particular finishing hold or move actually ends a match in his favor. This year, we asked 10 questions.

Lex's clothesline

41. WHO HAS THE BEST CLOTHESLINE?

Lex Luger	*29% (15%)*
Kevin Nash	*25% (3%)*
The Giant	*15% (10%)*
The Undertaker	*9% (14%)*
Rick Steiner	*8% (0%)*
Others	*14% (21%)*

The clothesline is such an effective, simple, and devastating move that just about every wrestler in the world uses it in some form. Some favor a standing clothesline, while others execute it while in various aerial modes. An effective clothesline can end a match instantly or, at the very least, render an opponent incompetent for the rest of a match. Hulk Hogan has an outstanding clothesline and is WCW World champion, but he wrestles so infrequently that our insiders mostly passed him over. Lex Luger has huge arms and puts tremendous force behind his clothesline, while Kevin Nash also delivers the clothesline with great *oomph*.

42. WHO HAS THE BEST DROPKICK?

Rey Misterio Jr.	*18% (19%)*
Six	*17% (18%)*
Alex Wright	*16% (22%)*
Eddy Guerrero	*14% (17%)*
Jeff Jarrett	*13% (2%)*
Owen Hart	*9% (1%)*
Others	*13% (8%)*

As aerial wrestling gets more popular and aerial wrestlers become more common, the dropkick is being used more often. Even The Giant, a big man who usually feels more secure with his feet on the mat, occasionally tries dropkicks. This is one of wrestling's oldest and most sensational maneuvers, a classic aerial move of tremendous grace. One dropkick by itself usually won't do the job, though. Support was spread out this year, and Rey Misterio Jr., the sensational 140-pounder, won by a slight margin over Six, the former 1-2-3 Kid.

43. WHO HAS THE BEST MOONSAULT?

The moonsault is the move of the 1990s. A high-risk maneuver that fans love and wrestlers love to execute, it involves a backward flip from the top turnbuckle, then a pinpoint landing on top of the opponent. Its effectiveness has much to do with a wrestler's willingness to execute it from anywhere in the arena—under even the most dangerous conditions. Misterio pulled ahead in this category, passing Flash Funk, last year's winner. Big Van Vader, one of the biggest men to ever execute the moonsault, didn't get enough support to warrant mention.

Rey Misterio Jr	*41% (32%)*
Flash Funk	*30% (33%)*
Sabu	*15% (19%)*
Others	*14% (0%)*

44. WHO HAS THE BEST PILEDRIVER?

'Taker's "tombstone"

The Undertaker .....*92% (80%)*
Others .....*8% (2%)*

Here's another classic maneuver that remains with us simply because it's so effective. Actually, devastating is a better word, and it's amazing more wrestlers haven't been paralyzed by the piledriver, which involves the executor turning his victim upside down between his legs, then dropping down so that the victim's head or back goes crashing into the mat. *Ouch!* The Undertaker's "tombstone" piledriver is clearly the most effective in the game and the one all opponents want to avoid. It won last year by a wide margin, and the margin became wider this year. One note: Many wrestlers seem to prefer the power bomb over the piledriver these days. And whatever happened to Paul Bearer?

45. WHO HAS THE BEST POWERSLAM?

We thought our insiders erred last year when they gave Ahmed Johnson the edge over Davey Boy Smith in this category, but they corrected their mistake this year. The "British Bulldog" is the winner again, and that's no surprise. Davey Boy has wrestled more frequently this year, and that could be the reason for his increased support. Ahmed Johnson, now an established star, relies more on his "Pearl River Plunge" than the powerslam. Lex Luger has harnessed his power.

A "Bulldog" powerslam

Davey Boy Smith . . .47% (28%)
Ahmed Johnson . . .23% (29%)
Lex Luger .....*22% (20%)*
Others .....*8% (8%)*

46. WHO HAS THE BEST SUBMISSION LEGLOCK?

Bret Hart .....*49% (45%)*
Dean Malenko .....*40% (0%)*
Others .....*11% (5%)*

Submission leglocks such as Hart's "sharpshooter" and Ric Flair's figure-four are difficult to execute because they require the victim to be in a prone, helpless position. And they're easily reversed if the opponent hasn't been sufficiently weakened. We revised this question from "Who has the best Scorpion deathlock/'sharpshooter'?" and there's a good chance we won't use it next year. "The Hitman's" version of the "sharpshooter" is the leglock by which all others are judged, while Dean Malenko has impressed many people with his Texas cloverleaf.

Bret's "sharpshooter"

Davey Boy Smith . . .48% (35%)
Taz .....*15% (0%)*
Chris Benoit .....*11% (2%)*
The Giant .....*9% (1%)*
Shane Douglas .....*8% (0%)*
Lex Luger .....*5% (13%)*
Others .....*4% (7%)*

47. WHO HAS THE BEST VERTICAL SUPLEX?

Our insiders might have been confused by this question. Some of the wrestlers named, such as Taz, Chris Benoit, and Shane Douglas, rarely use the vertical suplex, although they do use other variations of suplexes (belly-to-back, etc.). Davey Boy scored his third consecutive win in this category, this time by his largest margin, while Ric Flair, who's been out with a shoulder injury since November, dropped out of the picture. The Giant does use the vertical suplex, and he executes it very well.

48. WHO HAS THE BEST POWER BOMB?

Some wrestling fans say the power bomb is their favorite move, and we can understand why. The power bomb is a pure power move that's potentially crippling when properly executed. It's a move that opponents of Nash, Vicious, and Vader desperately try to avoid, because when any of these men execute the power bomb, a pin and a stretcher usually follow. Last year, Vader and Nash (then known as Diesel) finished in a flat-footed tie. It was a bad year for Vader, but a good year for Nash and former WWF World champion Sid Vicious, who battled one-two until the final ballots were counted.

Kevin Nash	*37% (46%)*
Sid Vicious	*35% (8%)*
Big Van Vader	*22% (46%)*
Others	*6% (0%)*

Nash's "jackknife"

49. WHO HAS THE BEST OVERALL FINISHER?

"Diamond" Dallas Page ("Diamondcutter")	*19% (0%)*
The Undertaker ("tombstone" piledriver)	*18% (22%)*
Steve Austin ("Stone-Cold stunner")	*16% (0%)*
Bret Hart ("sharpshooter")	*14% (25%)*
Ahmed Johnson ("Pearl River Plunge")	*13% (15%)*
The Giant (choke-slam)	*9% (2%)*
Others	*11% (11%)*

50. WHAT IS WRESTLING'S BEST MANEUVER?

Well, whaddya know! The power bomb, still used with great effectiveness by several wrestlers, still lives! It overcame last year's winner, the moonsault, in this second-year category. "The effectiveness of the power bomb can't be denied," wrote one insider. "People get up from moonsaults. You don't get up from a properly executed power bomb. If the move is done properly, it's curtains for sure."

Vader's power bomb

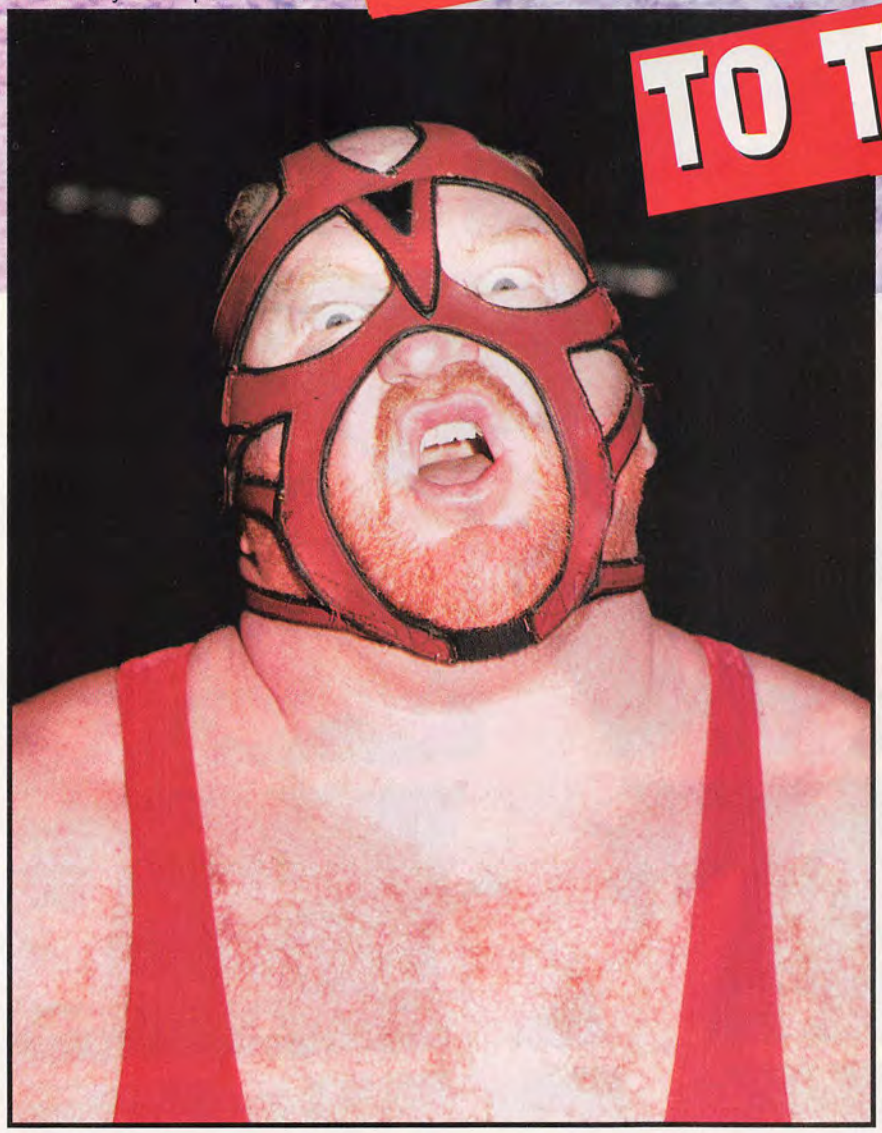
The power bomb	*38% (2%)*
The moonsault	*30% (38%)*
The choke-slam	*12% (1%)*
Others	*20% (8%)*

This same question 20 years ago would have drawn responses like Boston crab, abdominal stretch, and clawhold. While yesterday's stars favored agonizing submission holds, today's wrestlers are looking for a quick, high-impact blast. Last year's winner, Bret Hart, whose "sharpshooter" is a bit of a throwback, is no longer WWF World champion, so his "sharpshooter" dropped a few notches. The Undertaker's "tombstone" piledriver is a crippling finisher. Two newcomers cracked the top six, with "Diamond" Dallas Page's "Diamond cutter," the move that revitalized his career, and Steve Austin's "Stone-Cold stunner," the move that made him a big name in the WWF. Clearly, the results here prove that an effective finishing maneuver can change everything for a wrestler, converting him from also-ran to major player. The results also show that, unlike a few years ago, when the power bomb ruled, there's no one dominant finishing maneuver in wrestling. Indeed, variety has become the spice of wrestling life. By the way, don't try these moves at home!

PWI PREDICTS:

BEARER WILL BRING VADER BACK TO THE TOP!

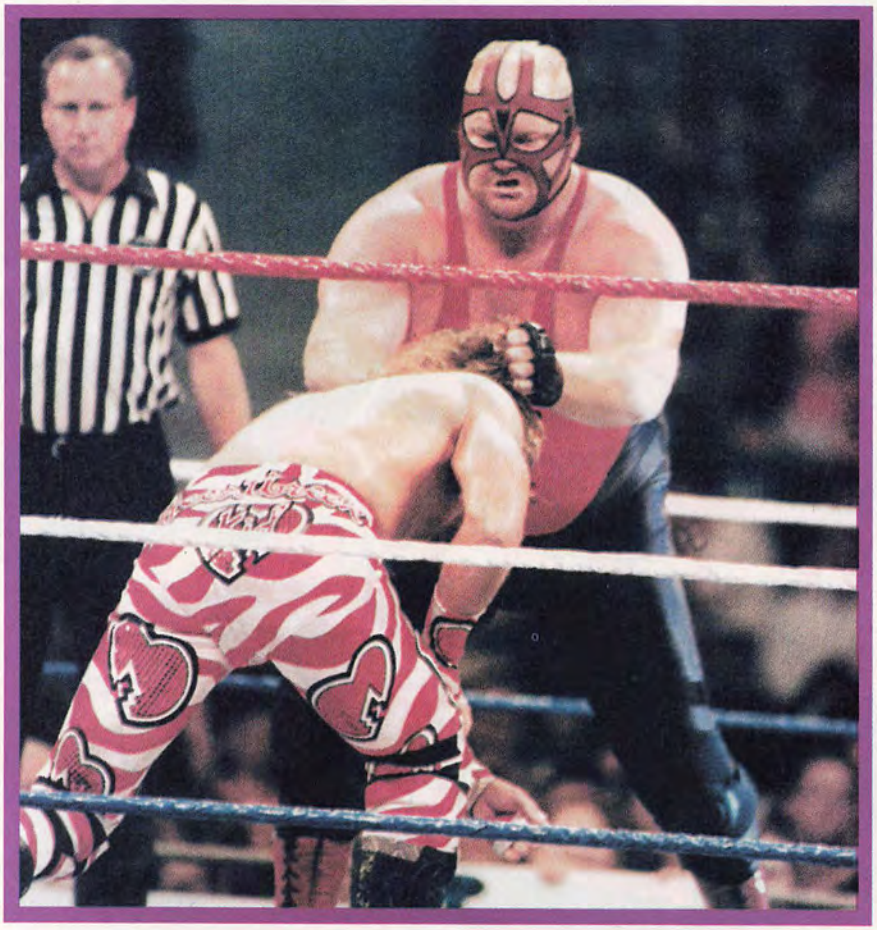
Photos by Bill Apter



Big Van Vader thought Jim Cornette would be the man to lead him to the WWF's promised land. Didn't happen. Now he's turning to a pasty-faced man who carries around an urn. Believe it or not, this could work!

By Bryan Ethier

BIG VAN VADER cringed and clutched his Big Van Gut with disgust as his manager, Jim Cornette, streaked out of the building clad only in his BVDs. Moments earlier, Cornette's new wunderkind, Mini Vader, had stripped Cornette of his trousers after losing to Mascarita Sagrada.



Fools, Vader thought. *Why am I with this clown? What has he done for my career lately?*

Nothing, which is what piqued Vader during the WWF's inaugural edition of *Shotgun Saturday Night.*

Squat, Vader decided, and days later officially severed ties with the king of forehands, Mr. Cornette.

"These last few months have been wasted for Vader," said Barry Windham. "I think Vader hooked up with Cornette because Cornette always had the means to get his guys big matches. He also had the cash to sign some of the best wrestlers. Just look at Owen Hart and Davey Boy Smith. He blew it and lost them to Clarence Mason. Cornette's weakness is that he is so greedy for success and money that he goes off on half-baked schemes

Big Van Vader had chances to beat Shawn Michaels for the WWF title this summer (left), and he even pinned him in two tag team matches, but he recently grew angry with manager Jim Cornette (below) for not getting him all the matches he wanted.

Photo by Gary Dineen/Winning Image

What Paul Bearer needs to do is make Vader the angry, ruthless, cold wrestler he was for so long. He showed some of that old nastiness in some matches with Steve Austin.

Grayle, 39, who has been a Vader fan since the power-bomber made his pro debut. "He started out so great by beating up Monsoon. To see that giant gorilla prone and almost unconscious made my heart go pitter-patter. That was the Vader we love—the ruthless, heartless monster of a man who will destroy anything in his path."

Ultimately, Vader's monstrous demeanor and style got lost like one of Godzilla's offspring in a Tokyo disco. Over the last few months, he has lost not only his vim and verve, but some of his matches as well.

"His heart just wasn't into it there for a while," said Justin Bradshaw. "He used to always be in a real bad mood in the dressing room. It gave him an edge. But he's been real quiet lately. He needed a change."

The future ... will we have a kinder, gentler, feeble Vader who becomes yet another wasted talent?

Not if Paul Bearer, his new manager, has anything to say about it. Bearer

(Continued on page 72)

that backfire because he never completes them."

Cornette's duties as a broadcaster on *WWF Superstars*, coupled with his divergent pursuit of Mexican wrestlers, midget wrestlers, and any mouthy man or woman who could squeeze into wrestling tights left him little time to focus on Vader. Just one year ago, the 6'5", 450-pounder was hailed as the world's most dangerous rulebreaker, a future WWF champ. However, about all Vader has broken over the last year is Gorilla Monsoon's spirit and the hearts of his few fans.

"It's a damn shame," said Jerry

Bearer has probably already instructed Vader to start using chairs more often. He used to do that all the time. The fact that he was so unpredictable and out of control is what made him great.

press conference...

Hard to believe, but Savio Vega is raising his fist right along with Faarooq and Crush as a show of support for the Nation of Domination. Vega feels has finally "found himself."

SAVIO VEGA

WHEN HE BURST onto the WWF scene to help old friend Scott "Razor Ramon" Hall two years ago, Savio Vega won the hearts of thousands of wrestling fans with his dogged determination and commitment to fighting the good, clean fight. His immense popularity made him an easy target for rulebreakers, but Vega never seemed to mind. He had years of experience on his side. Before joining the WWF, he had competed as TNT in one of the toughest territories in the world, his native Puerto Rico.

But something happened to the veteran grappler this winter. The spotlight that had shone so brightly on him suddenly began to fade. Minor injuries and short losing streaks forced Vega to think about making some drastic and dramatic changes in his ring style and personality.

During a tag team match at Madison Square Garden that pitted Vega and Ahmed Johnson against the Nation of Domination's Faarooq and Crush, Vega inexplicably turned against his partner and caused him to get pinned. Afterward, he and Faarooq tore up a miniature Puerto Rican flag. That night on ***Shotgun Saturday Night****, though, Vega apologized for his actions, claiming that his temper had gotten the best of him. But his request for forgiveness rang hollow when he assisted the NOD in an attack against young Rocky Maivia.*

Instead of using his fists against rulebreakers, Vega now raises a fist in the air as an official member of Clarence Mason's nefarious organization. He's looking to forget his past completely.

Editor-in-Chief Dave Lenker, Managing Editor Brandi Mankiewicz, and Senior Writer Steve Anderson recently sat down with the newest member of the NOD to get his thoughts on what's been going on.

DAVE LENKER: I guess the question on all our minds is this: What the heck happened to you?

SAVIO VEGA: What do you mean, "What happened to me?" What happened was that Savio Vega finally wised up. I realized my future was not with the fans but with the Nation of Domination. It was like the sun shined in and I had my own awakening.

BRANDI MANKIEWICZ: But you have to admit that this change was awfully sudden. What led up to it, and how long were you thinking about it?

> **"From this point on for Savio Vega, my life is dedicated to the Nation of Domination. If you don't like it, just stay out of my way and you won't get hurt."**

VEGA: I learned that while the fans were supporting me, I was not getting me anywhere. I thought about this a long time. I'm a veteran wrestler who should be getting title shots and a lot of attention. Instead, I get lost in the shuffle while others less deserving get their opportunities. I can be thick-headed sometimes. It took me a while to make this decision, but I'm glad I did.

STEVE ANDERSON: How was Clarence Mason successful in recruiting you?

VEGA: Most of all, he understood my situation. He told me what I was already thinking, that I was underappreciated by fans and promoters. They took Savio Vega for granted. They think I will always be there to battle the bad guys. But they're not taking me for granted now. The Nation of Domination will not take Savio Vega for granted.

LENKER: What was your main motivation for joining the Nation of Domination? Was it money, title opportunities, or a chance to get noticed?

VEGA: A combination of all of that. Mr. Mason made me an offer that I couldn't refuse. I'm making more money now than I ever made, and title shots are going to come. Besides, in the WWF, if you're not with the Nation, you're against them. They are just getting too strong.

MANKIEWICZ: So you joined them out of fear?

VEGA: That's a pretty brave thing to say. You're lucky that you're a lady or I'd knock you out right here and now. No. Savio Vega doesn't fear nobody. Joining the Nation was a recognition of reality. They are taking over, so why not get in on the ground floor while you can?

ANDERSON: So now that we understood why you did it, why did you apologize on *Shotgun* and then basically do everything all over again?

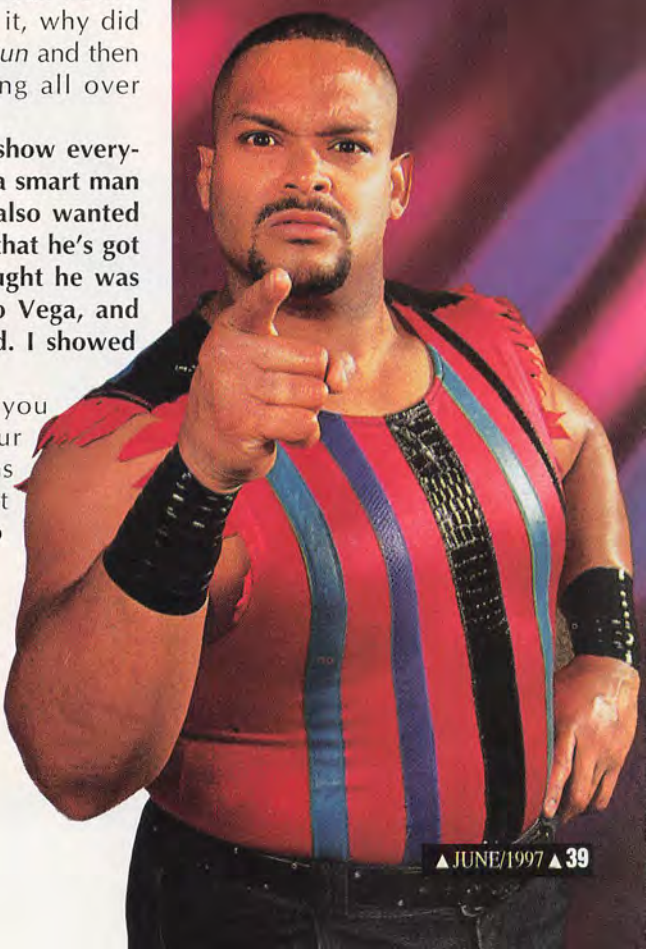
VEGA: I wanted to show everyone that Savio Vega is a smart man and a devious man. I also wanted to show Rocky Maivia that he's got a lot to learn. He thought he was wrestling the old Savio Vega, and he took me for granted. I showed him something.

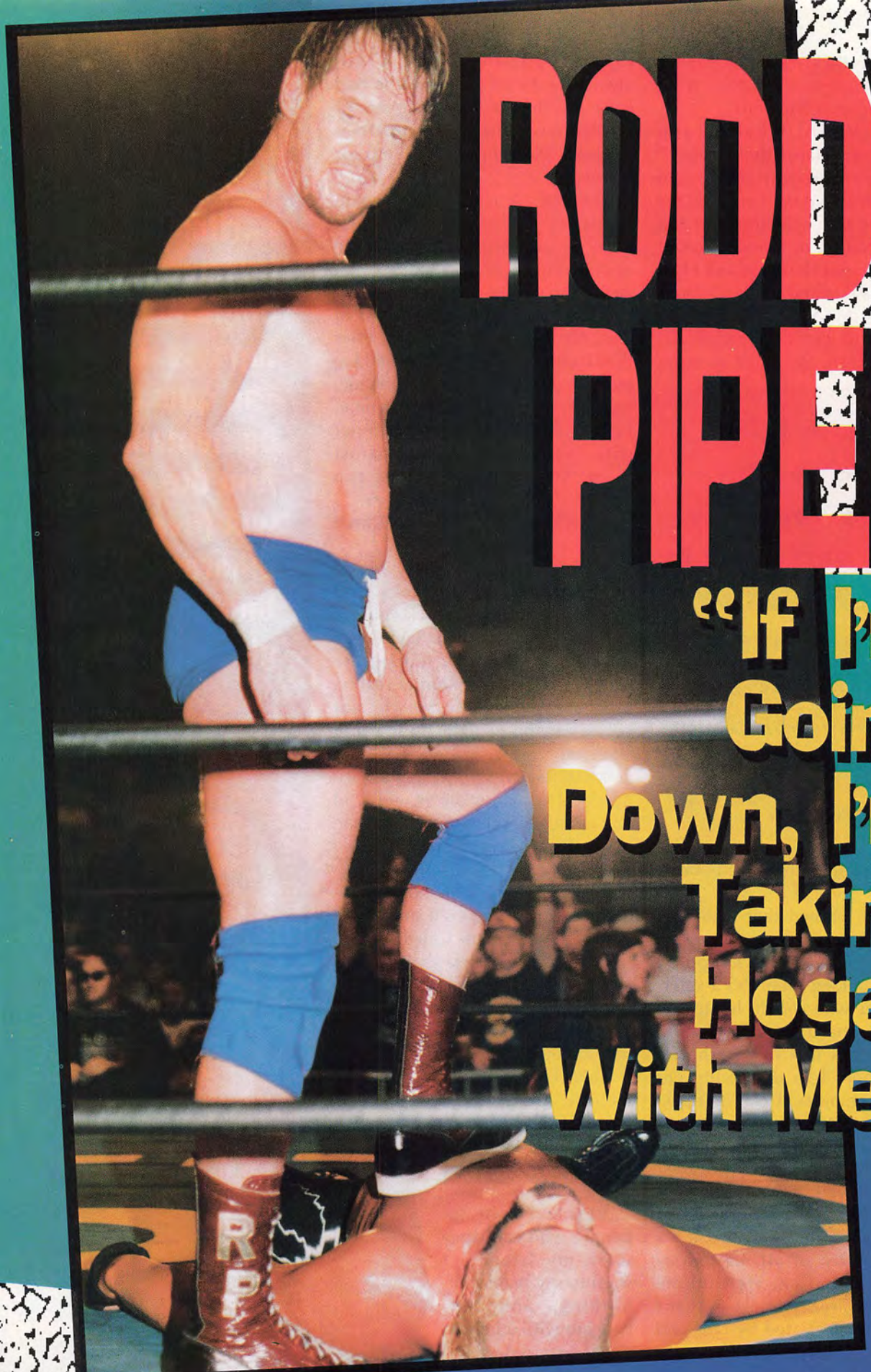
LENKER: What do you have to say to all your former friends and fans who want to know what happened to Savio Vega?

VEGA: To all the people who said they were my friends, I want to say thanks for nothing, and I'm hanging with a better

(Continued on page 76)

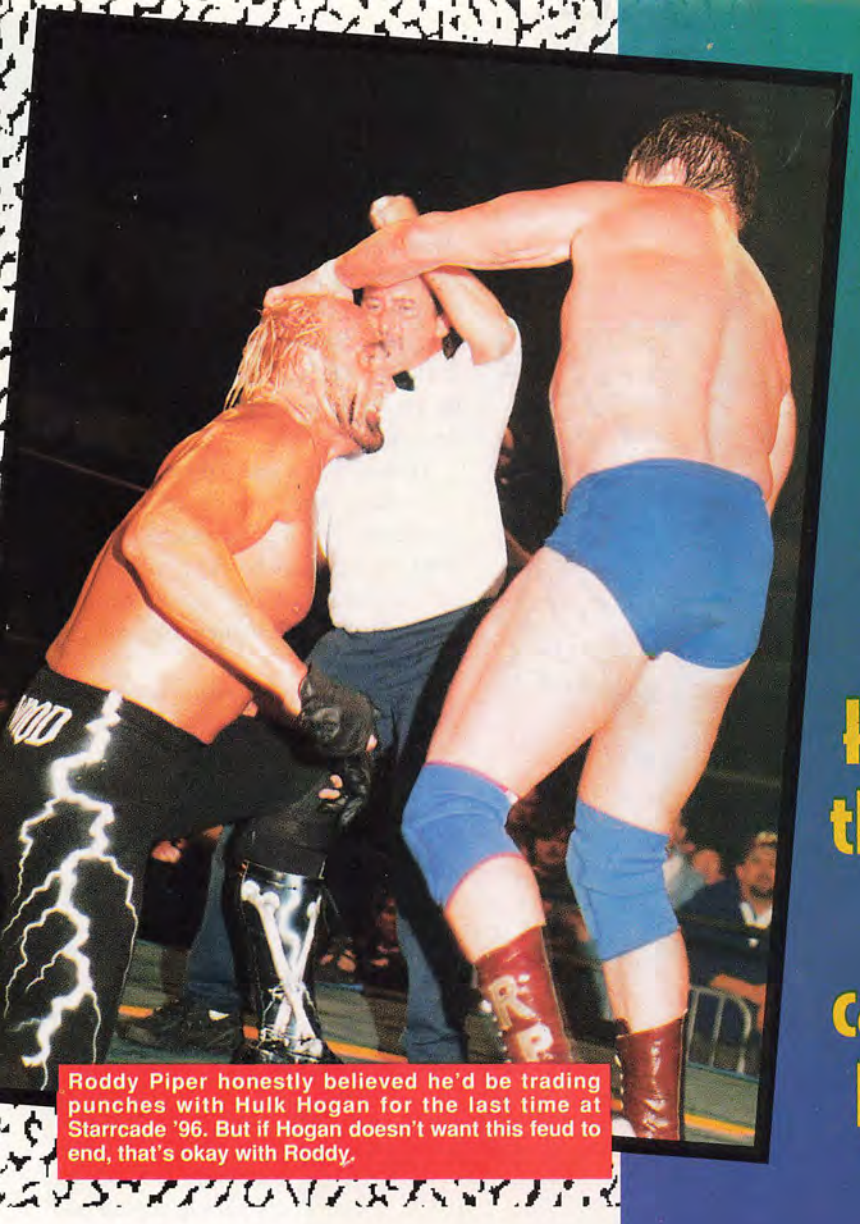
Every issue, reporters from PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED will participate in an incisive press conference with a top wrestling star. The questions will be demanding. And the answers will reveal the innermost thoughts of the giants of the sport.





RODDY PIPER

"If I'm Going Down, I'm Taking Hogan With Me!"



Roddy Piper honestly believed he'd be trading punches with Hulk Hogan for the last time at Starrcade '96. But if Hogan doesn't want this feud to end, that's okay with Roddy.

When Roddy Piper let his guard down against the NWO, he paid a price. Now he wants to settle the score with Hulk Hogan regardless of the consequences. If Piper is to be a casualty in this war, he refuses to be the only one

By Harry Burkett

THE DAMP OREGON air was very familiar to Roddy Piper. As he leaned against a fencepost and gazed across the vast expanse of his ranch, Piper thought about all the days he spent struggling to become the best wrestler in this region. Every time he left an arena back then, he would take a deep breath of that air and dream about becoming famous.

On this cool morning, though, Piper didn't need to be haunted by the ghosts of yesterday. As far as he was concerned, his life was in full blossom. A proud father of six, he knew his family life couldn't be better. The recent release of *Marked Man* was going to advance his acting career even further. For some reason, however, success wasn't tasting or smelling as sweet as he had imagined it would way back when.

The reason? Hulk Hogan.

At Starrcade '96, Piper stunned a lot of people by soundly defeating his greatest nemesis in a way that no one thought possible. When Piper locked on that sleeperhold, felt Hogan's body go limp, and saw the referee signal for the bell, he was overwhelmed with ecstasy. He had capped his legendary career by living out every wrestler's fantasy: He had a clean victory over Hulk Hogan.

For 24 hours, Piper replayed the match in his mind over and over again and kept on smiling. Although he wasn't scheduled to appear on *WCW Monday Nitro* the next night, the "Rowdy Scot" couldn't resist coming out and thanking all the fans who had stood behind him—and bidding them a final goodbye.

Not known for being sentimental, Piper couldn't suppress a big smile as the crowd roared its approval. The cheers were not just for his victory over Hogan. The fans were cheering a career.

Then the NWO's theme music was pumped into the arena. It was a cue for

Hogan seemed to make a big mistake at Starrcade when he took the battle with Piper outside the ring. Piper loves a good brawl. "Life's a streetfight," he says.

the sickening scene that was about to unfold. After being lured into a fight by Hogan, Piper was once again the victim of a vicious gang-style attack.

As he was carried away on a stretcher, Piper screamed words in Gaelic as if he were desperately trying to summon the strength of his Scottish ancestors. But his fury wasn't directed at Hogan. He was furious with himself for doing something Roddy Piper had never done before.

He had let his guard down.

Today, the memories of his Starrcade victory are marred by the NWO's constant barrage of assaults and insults. To Piper, no measure of personal or professional success can surpass that.

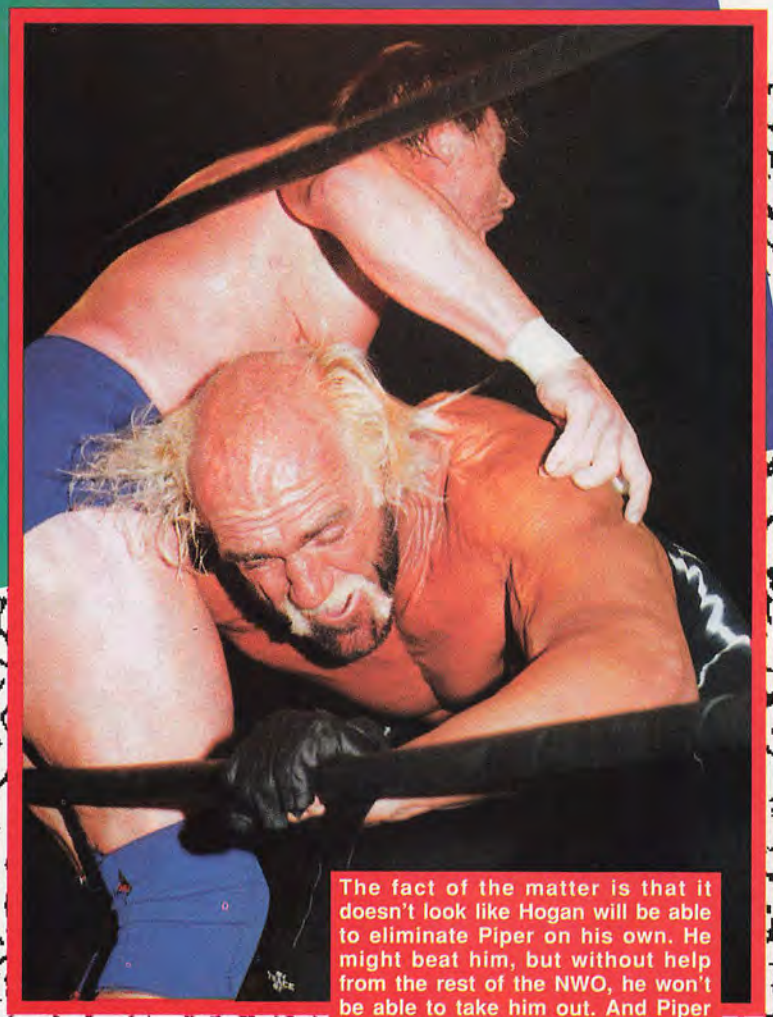
"There might not be enough fresh air in the world to keep me happy now," said Piper. "Hogan may want me to forget about him and go after my star on the Walk of Fame, but he hasn't seen nothin' yet. The Loch Ness Monster's going to roar like never before. The old Roddy Piper is back!"

Of course, Hogan seemed to brush off Piper's warning. "Yeah, yeah, I'm sure that red-headed stepchild is shooting off his big mouth and saying he's going to knock the NWO World champion off his throne. As usual, he's all talk, no action.

"Everybody's heard Piper's song before. That gimp better just concentrate on resting that hip and stop riding my coattails."

Other people might have heard Piper's song before, but many of them have also felt his wrath. Observers with vivid memories remember the hungry Roddy Piper, a ruthless individual driven to incredibly dangerous extremes.

Piper won't be remembered for long championship reigns; his storied career consists mostly



The fact of the matter is that it doesn't look like Hogan will be able to eliminate Piper on his own. He might beat him, but without help from the rest of the NWO, he won't be able to take him out. And Piper isn't afraid of the NWO en masse.

of violent feuds of unbelievable intensity. Longtime fans remember when he challenged the entire Guerrero family during his early years in California, when he injured Jimmy Snuka's neck in a wild Madison Square Garden melee, and when he sent Cyndi Lauper and Dick Clark running for cover as he smashed a plaque over Capt. Lou Albano's head. By taking on the icons of the sport, including Hulk Hogan, Piper earned a dubious honor: the title of "legend-killer."

Greg Valentine, who sidelined Piper with a devastating ear injury in 1983, cautions Hogan to be careful. "Our trouble began when I maimed Piper's ear during a match for his U.S. title," Valentine said. "The referee stopped it and awarded me the belt. I thought that would slow him down. But it didn't. I pounded him into the mat night after night, but he kept coming back for more. Heck, during one match, he wrapped a belt around my neck and tried to choke the life out of me. He was a maniac."

Piper finally got his revenge when he defeated Valentine in a bloody dog-collar match at the first Starrcade. "When we were both in the WWF the following year, I kept my distance," said Valentine. "Piper wasn't going to drag me down again."

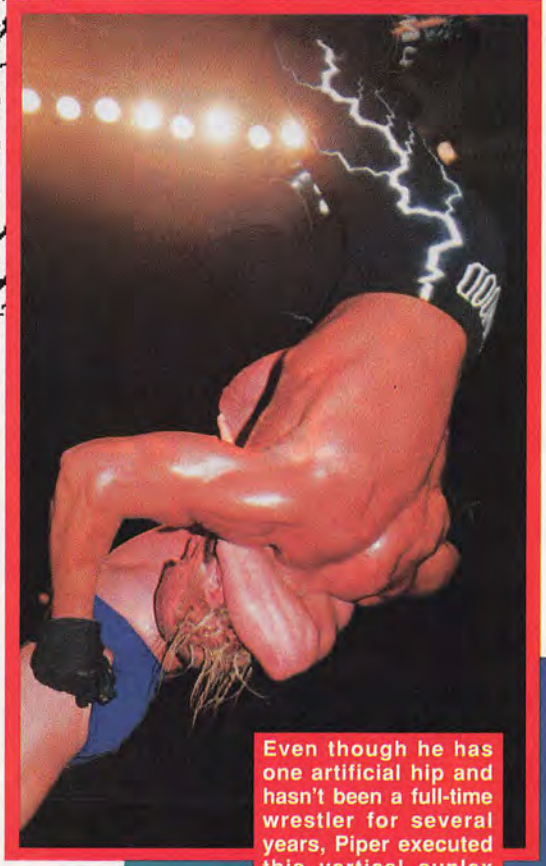
In many ways, Piper's greatest strength has also been his greatest weakness. His gutsy, never-say-die attitude has helped him beat larger, stronger, faster, and even more skilled opponents. But this mentality never allows him to walk away from a fight—even when he should. And he has the scars to prove it.

"Life's a streetfight, man," mused Piper. "If you can't dish it out, you're gonna end up taking it. If I'm a danger to myself, I'm sure as hell a lot more dangerous to everybody else.

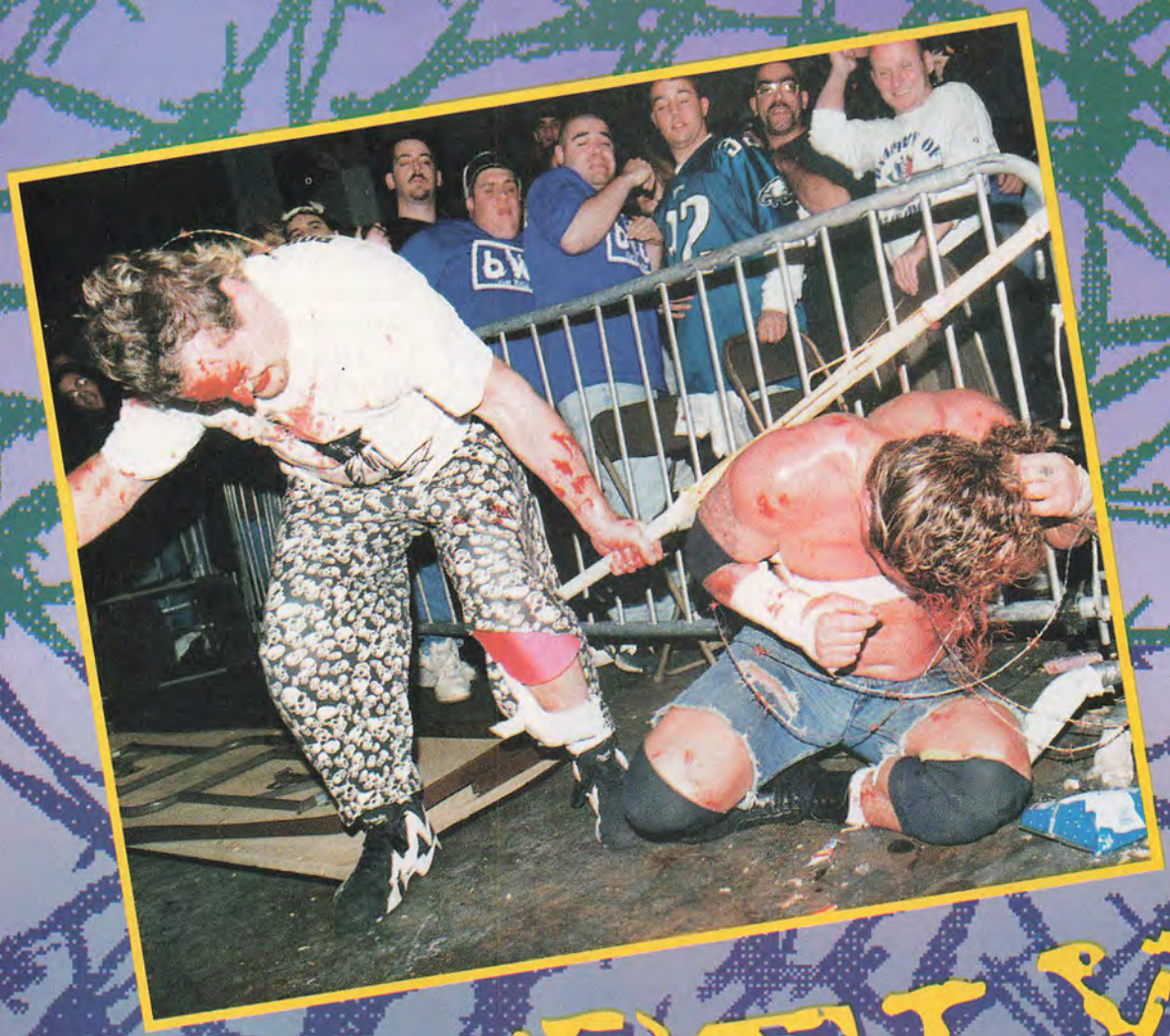
"LL Cool J was right when he said, 'If you slapped Roddy Piper and you didn't get a hassle, you're a liar.' The NWO says they slapped R.P. and didn't get a hassle. No way, not gonna happen. If I'm going down, I'm taking Hogan with me!"

No other man with a loving family, plenty of money, and blossoming film career would risk life and limb for a war with the NWO. But Roddy Piper likes to be ahead on the scorecard.

That's why Hulk Hogan is the real *Marked Man.* □



Even though he has one artificial hip and hasn't been a full-time wrestler for several years, Piper executed this vertical suplex very well. Piper doesn't look like a man who'll be "going down" anytime soon.



"BARELY LEGAL"

ECW Takes Pay-Per-View To A New Extreme!

The main event of ECW's Barely Legal could feature another nasty Sandman-Raven match (opposite page, left), or Terry Funk could get a shot at pummeling the ECW champ (above), or former pals Raven and Stevie Richards (right) could do battle for the heavyweight title.

The most anticipated pay-per-view in recent memory is on the horizon. Will it succeed? The answer depends on ECW, its supporters, and perhaps most of all, fans who are not yet sold on "extreme" wrestling

By Steve Anderson

FOR THE PAST several years, fans have complained that there are just too many wrestling pay-per-views. The PPV schedule once included *quarterly* events from both the WWF and WCW; now those two promotions have PPVs almost every month. Heck, you need a small fortune or a significant line of credit to afford them all!

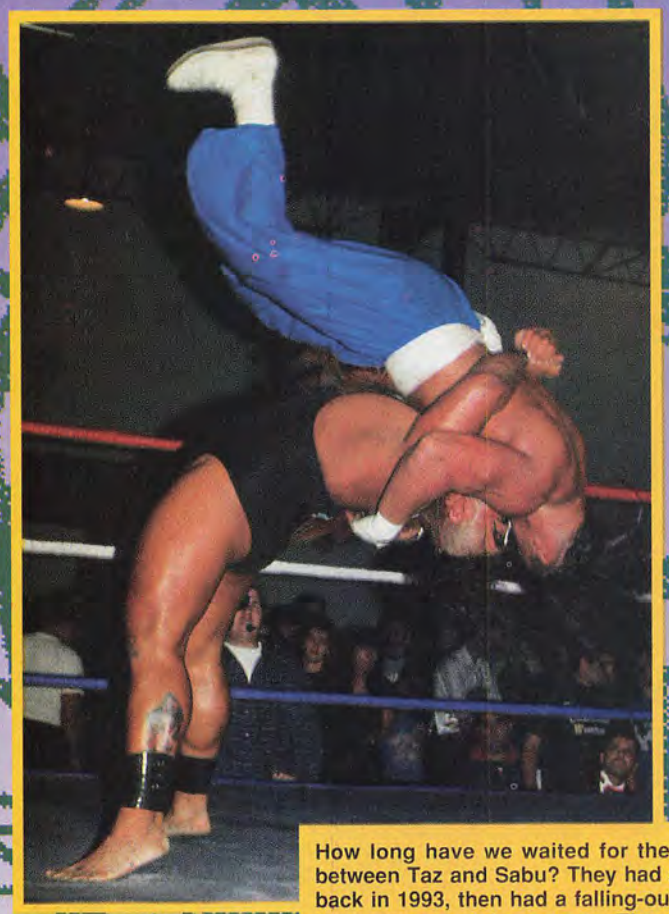
Now we're getting more?!

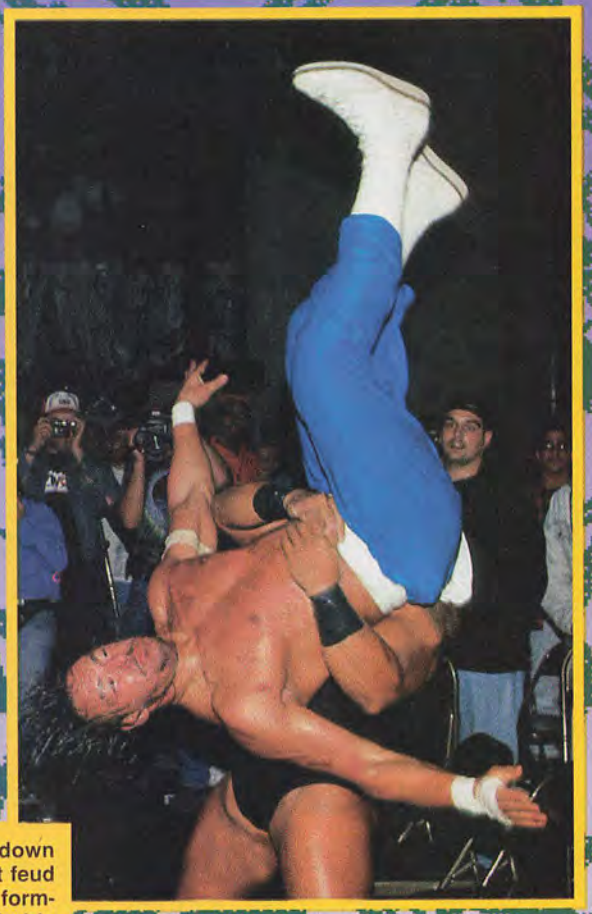
Do we need another wrestling PPV? Do we want one?

If it's different than all the others, then yes, maybe there is room for another. And on April 13 we will get something different. After years of speculation, Philadelphia-based Extreme Championship Wrestling has announced that it will promote its first pay-per-view, Barely Legal, on that night.

The question is: Can a third promotion present a pay-per-view that will not just be exciting and worth watching, but also succeed in the all-important area of buy rates?

ECW has already made it clear that Barely Legal will not be your run-of-the-mill event. For those of you who enjoy gathering the whole family around the TV to watch WWF and WCW PPVs, well, you might not want to do that for this event. It's not for little children. Barely Legal will not feature merchandisable stars with faces paint-





How long have we waited for the showdown between Taz and Sabu? They had a great feud back in 1993, then had a falling-out after forming a successful tag team. They'll probably meet at Barely Legal.

ed and muscles flexing. This event figures to be ECW at its ultraviolent best. And there could be a few scantily clad women thrown in for good measure.

"ECW is more extreme and more aggressive than other wrestling events that we carry," said Debbie Barackman, vice president of programming for Request TV, which will distribute the PPV. "We have taken several precautions to ensure that the event is geared to an adult audience."

Request TV plans to advertise Barely Legal as an adult event with parental warnings similar to the ones put on R-rated movies. In addition, the show will not air in the traditional 7 to 10 p.m. Eastern/Pacific time slot. Rather, it will air at 9 p.m., with a replay offered at midnight.

Obviously, those wrestling fans weary of the sanitized kiddie fare will be attracted to this show. But selling the event to a national audience might be a steep mountain to climb. The WWF and WCW are both seen all over the U.S. on national cable networks. They have recognizable and marketable stars that can practically offer guaranteed excitement and quality matches.

Although ECW does not have that kind of TV exposure, even many of those who can't see the promotion's events live or see its weekly TV show are interested in ECW. Just check out the Internet if you want proof of that. A rare opportunity to see ECW stars in action may just be enough for a lot of these fans to plunk down their $19.95.

"The opportunity for our growing fan base around the country to see ECW on pay-per-view will be a great boost for us and take ECW to another plateau," said ECW's Paul E. Dangerously.

But when all is said and done, what will matter most is that buy rate. How many people will purchase the show? Enough for ECW promoters to make a profit?

"Making money on April 13 is important," said ECW President Tod Gordon, "but that's not our only objective. We are looking at a long-term proposition, scheduling pay-per-views on a regular basis."

ECW knows that it can count on a certain amount of curiosity buys from people who have read about ECW but have never had an opportunity to see the product. But to get people to come back, the matches had better be good. Speaking of which ...

ECW is promising a triangle match between Terry Funk, The Sandman, and Stevie Richards, the winner of which is to get a shot

ECW TV champion Shane Douglas is tentatively scheduled to wrestle Pit Bull II at Barely Legal. Who would have thought we'd ever see that on a pay-per-view? ECW promoters think fans will pay $19.95 to see it.

The Eliminators will probably get to wrestle on Barely Legal, too. John Kronus and Perry Saturn are considered by many to be one of the most talented duos in the world, but they've never been on a PPV.

at Raven's heavyweight title later on the card. Funk is certainly an established star, and he recently got some national exposure when he took part in the 1997 WWF Royal Rumble. Sandman also got some exposure when he, Dangerously, and Tommy Dreamer disrupted the WWF's In Your House PPV in Philadelphia in September.

In addition, the worst-kept secret in wrestling, the identity of ECW's mysterious masked man, might be revealed at Barely Legal. He has hinted that he might take off the mask and show everyone his "ravishing" self.

Other matches could see former tag team partners Taz and Sabu finally clash in the ring, TV champ Shane Douglas defending his belt against Pit Bull II, and several stars from Japan's Michinoku Pro Wrestling in a tag team bout.

Good enough for a pay-per-view? That's a tough question to answer. ECW is still a fairly new promotion (founded 1992). In the past, upstarts like the LPWA and Herb Abrams' UWF have tried going the PPV route only to see their shows flop and their promotions go down in flames. Even the now-defunct AWF was considering putting together a PPV at one point.

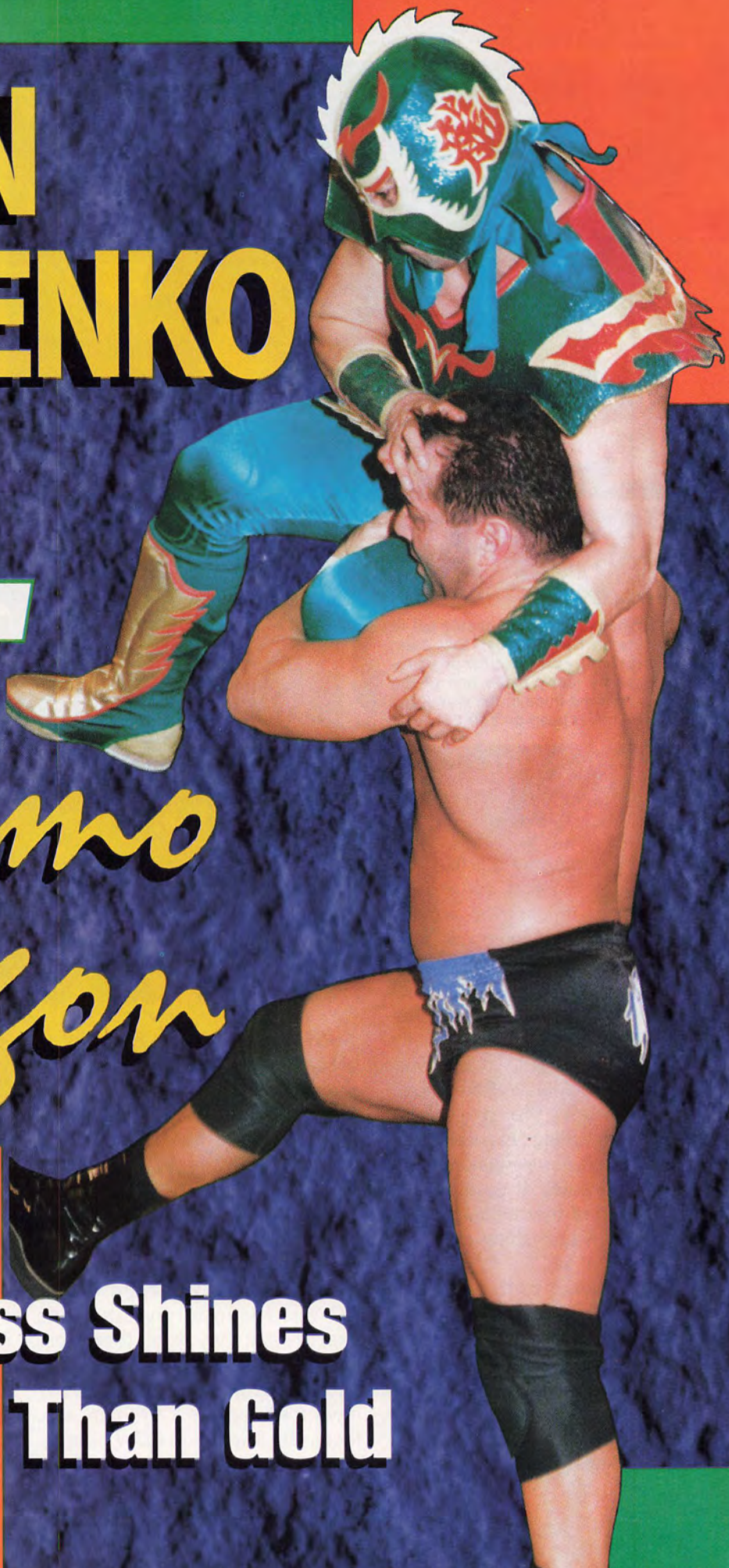
Perhaps the key here is that ECW is trying to give the fans exactly what they want. Promoters know fans like the extreme style because both the WWF and WCW have tried to give it to them, too, these last few years. ECW promoters and wrestlers have even gone so far as to accuse the WWF and WCW of "copying" ECW.

So the same question remains: Is Barely Legal going to be a success or a failure?

Whether you love or loathe ECW, you should want this show to succeed, because if it does, we'll be able to say with some certainty that ECW is a legitimate alternative to the WWF and WCW, and that the WWF and WCW have more than each other to worry about. The more major players there are in wrestling the better.

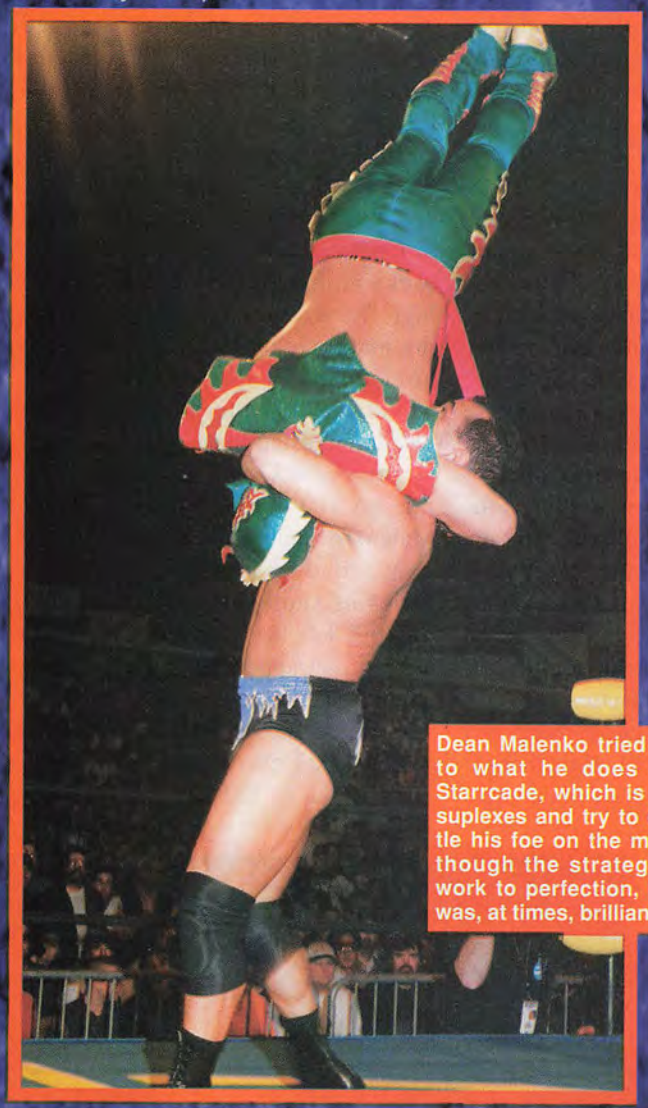
As Dangerously said, it's time for ECW to go to the next plateau. Or at least try to get there. □

DEAN MALENKO VS. Ultimo Dragon



When Greatness Shines Brighter Than Gold

Photos by Bill Apter



Dean Malenko tried to stick to what he does best at Starrcade, which is execute suplexes and try to outwrestle his foe on the mat. Even though the strategy didn't work to perfection, Malenko was, at times, brilliant.

Does the belt make the man, or does the man make the belt? While wrestling each other for a myriad titles, Dean Malenko and Ultimo Dragon may have provided the answer to that age-old question

By Steve Anderson

REMEMBER THE GOOD old days of professional wrestling? When grapplers competed for pride? When there weren't so many bizarre specialty matches in which the losers had to do something humiliating? When almost all the *truly* significant bouts were title matches?

Even during those important championship matches of years gone by, the skills of each wrestler would draw the crowd in and, for a brief time, some of the fans would forget that a belt was at stake.

"No one even thought about eating dog food or wearing a diaper back in the '50s," said 70-year-old fan Ray Bruin. "The victories themselves used to be enough. And if there was a belt at stake, well, even better."

Recently, two wrestlers have brought back a little of the flavor of those good old days. They have no

Though known primarily for his aerial skills, Ultimo Dragon used a few submission holds of his own at Starrcade, including this modified abdominal stretch.

interest in putting special stipulations on matches when they face each other. All they care about is the competition itself. When WCW cruiserweight champion Dean Malenko and former champ Ultimo Dragon first met in WCW, Dragon was the holder of eight different titles (collectively called the J-Crown), and Malenko had that cruiserweight title. Nine belts are hard to overlook, but at Starrcade '96, Malenko and Dragon made it easy. Talent was more glaring than forged metal on top of leather straps.

"As many belts as there were at ringside, it was real easy to just forget," said Stuart Ronsberg, 39, who attended the card in Nashville. "When Dragon won, that's when I remembered that there were titles at stake."

For many years, lighter wrestlers have been a tough sell for promoters. Since the mid-'80s, bulk and brawn have ruled the ring and the fans' attention. WCW tried and failed five years ago with its light heavyweight belt. The federation made a bold move by creating a cruiserweight division last year. But that move will never come close to the bold moves executed by Malenko and Dragon.

Starrcade '96 was billed as the "Battle Of The Icons," a reference to the match between Hulk Hogan and Roddy Piper. But two icons-in-waiting took the focus away from the ego clash of the wily veterans. Dragon-Malenko was a battle for nine belts, but once it got started, more than a few people looked at it as just a great battle.

While the two share a weight class, Malenko and Dragon have drastically different styles. Malenko is a ground wrestler who devastates his opponents with an array of suplexes, power moves, and submission holds. Dragon flies around the ring like an acrobat.

Their confrontation at Starrcade was the show-stealer. Placed first on the card, it served as much more than just a warmup act for the rest of the athletes on the show. In fact, many fans found a few of the remaining matches to be anti-climactic.

"This could have easily been the main event even without all the belts," said Mark Allen, 32, of Nashville. "The rest of the matches dragged compared to this one. They established a pace that no one else could follow."

Both men started slowly, using what broadcaster Mike Tenay called a "cautious offense." Malenko used a ground attack that incorporated armlocks and leglocks. The normally high-flying Dragon easily adapted to the mat style and matched Malenko hold for hold. But when Malenko would get the better of him, Dragon resorted to using illegal kicks.

Dragon was soon able to incorporate his risk-taking moves, though. Malenko, seeing his momentum slip away, tried to soften his foe with a series of suplexes and by working over his left leg. (Dragon had earlier injured that appendage by attempting a moonsault.)

Sensing victory, Malenko locked on his Texas cloverleaf on two occa-

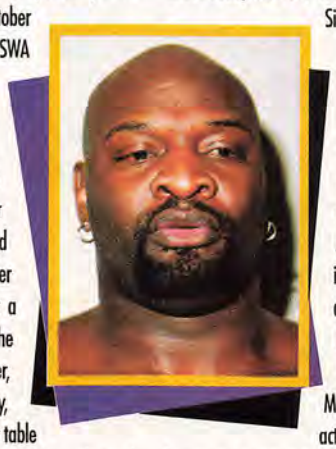
(Continued on page 74)

Ultimo Dragon's moonsault didn't quite hit its target (far right), but Malenko's leapfrog worked okay (right). Though these two men don't have similar styles, they've developed a terrific rivalry.

close-up:

AHMED JOHNSON

AHMED JOHNSON, ONE of the most sensational, popular, and fastest-rising wrestlers in the world, has been making an impact in the WWF for nearly 18 months now … The native of Pearl River, Mississippi, stands 6'3" and weighs 305 pounds … Was born June 6, 1966 … His family moved to Florida when he was eight … Played linebacker for his school football teams … Got into trouble as a teenager and ran away from home when he was 13 and subsequently joined a gang in Houston, Texas … Was shot twice in gang fights … By 10th grade, he had his own apartment and a car … Finished high school in Texas and went to college at Tennessee State University, where he played football … Was seen by talent scouts and invited to the Dallas Cowboys' scouting camp … Played linebacker for two years until he suffered a serious right shoulder injury in an auto accident … Left football and became a policeman in Houston; in his spare time, he worked out at a local gym … Was spotted in a weight room by former wrestling star Ivan Putski … Putski, along with Dick Murdoch, Joe Blanchard, and Ernie Ladd, trained him for a career in pro wrestling … Made his debut at the Dallas Sportatorium in mid-1993 as Moadib, managed by Gen. Skandor Akbar … Beat Black Bart in his debut match … Feuded mainly with Putski's son, Scott, and Chris Adams … Also wrestled as The Night Breeder for a while … Stayed in Texas for almost two years, until he was spotted by WWF talent scouts … Made his WWF debut at *Monday Night Raw* on October 23 in Brandon, Manitoba, defeating Jake Steele … Wrestled on a USWA card in Memphis, Tennessee, on November 6, 1995, and beat Jerry Lawler for the heavyweight title after repeatedly bodyslamming him … Dominated Rad Radford in subsequent WWF matches … Teamed with Davey Boy Smith, "Psycho" Sid Vicious, and Shawn Michaels to defeat Owen Hart, Yokozuna, Dean Douglas, and Razor Ramon at the 1995 Survivor Series in Landover, Maryland … Stunned everyone by bodyslamming the 568-pound Yokozuna … Soon after that, Jeff Jarrett challenged Johnson for the USWA title … Lost a rematch to Lawler by disqualification, but retained the belt … Lost the belt to Jarrett on December 13 in Tunica, Mississippi … Four days later, Jarrett made a surprise appearance at In Your House V in Hershey, Pennsylvania, and joined Lawler and Vince McMahon at the broadcast table for the Johnson-Dean Douglas bout … Buddy Landell replaced the injured Douglas and was quickly beaten by Johnson … Instead of interviewing Johnson, as they were supposed to do, Jarrett and Lawler took turns insulting him … When Johnson threatened Lawler, Jarrett smashed a gold CD casing over Ahmed's head. Then they brawled back to the dressing room, with "Double-J" getting the best of the action … Johnson defeated Davey Boy Smith by disqualification to crack the WWF ratings … Got revenge on Jarrett by winning several WWF rematches … Attacked Jarrett prior to their Royal Rumble match on January 21, 1996, in Fresno, California … Pounded Jarrett, then felled him with a powerslam. Jarrett retaliated by clotheslining Johnson on the arena floor and ramming him into the ring steps. Johnson won the match by DQ when Jarrett smashed a guitar over his head … Continued gaining stature as a fan favorite when he asked the WWF to lift Big Van Vader's suspension so he could get revenge on Vader for attacking WWF President Gorilla Monsoon … Defeated Isaac Yankem at In Your House VI on February 18, 1996 … Won a series of matches over Tatanka … Yokozuna turned fan favorite and occasionally teamed with Johnson … They defeated Davey Boy Smith and Owen Hart … Johnson, Jake Roberts, and Yokozuna lost to Owen Hart, Smith, and Vader at WrestleMania XII … Johnson's "Pearl River Plunge" finishing maneuver, meanwhile, was gaining notice as one of the most lethal moves in the sport … Johnson and Jake Roberts lost to Hart and Smith at In Your House VII … Beat Davey Boy Smith by disqualification in an arm-wrestling match in Munich, Germany, when Smith overturned the table at which they were seated and attacked him … Was undefeated in WWF singles matches until Owen Hart's interference caused him to lose a King of the Ring qualifying match to Vader on May 27, 1996 … Goldust tried to revive him by dispensing mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, enraging Johnson … Beat Vader twice on subsequent cards … Gained revenge on Goldust by defeating him for the WWF Intercontinental title on June 23, 1996, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Goldust was in control for most of the match and knocked Johnson unconscious at 13:30, but instead of going for the pin, he climbed on top of Johnson and administered mouth-to-mouth again. Johnson awoke, went on a rampage, and scored the pin at 15:35 following a "Pearl River Plunge" … It was by far the biggest victory of his life … Dubbed the I-C belt the "people's belt" … Later in the card, Johnson and The Ultimate Warrior saved Shawn Michaels from an attack by Owen Hart and Davey Boy Smith … Used his "Pearl River Plunge" three times on Goldust during a July 12 rematch and was disqualified for his actions … But Johnson was so enraged by Goldust that he didn't really care … Vader, Smith, and Hart defeated Johnson, Michaels, and "Psycho" Sid Vicious in a six-man match at In Your House VII … Suffered a ruptured left kidney during a sneak-attack by WWF newcomer Faarooq (the former Ron Simmons) at *Monday Night Raw* on July 22, 1996 … Johnson and Michaels were battling The Smokin' Gunns when Ahmed was knocked over the top rope and onto the arena floor. Faarooq, then managed by Sunny, ran out of the dressing room and started kneeing and kicking Johnson in the back. Michaels finally chased him away … Later in the night, Johnson was in pain as he wrestled Faarooq to a double-countout, the last time he'd defend the I-C belt … Doctors said Johnson could miss several months of action … Sunny demanded that Monsoon strip Johnson of the title … Monsoon finally did that when it became apparent he'd be out of action for longer than anticipated … Johnson silently stewed, knowing there was nothing he could do … Underwent surgery in Texas … Attacked Faarooq outside a locker room prior to In Your House X on October 20, 1996 … Faarooq suffered injuries to his legs and other parts of his body … "It's called payback," Johnson said. "When he comes back, I'll hurt him even worse!" … Finally returned to the ring in early-December and signed to wrestle Faarooq at the Royal Rumble … Wrestled Goldust to a no-contest in one match … Beat Crush by disqualification at the first *Shotgun Saturday Night* when the Nation of Domination interfered. Surprisingly, Goldust came to Johnson's rescue. Finally, the brawl spilled out of the building, and Johnson executed his "Pearl River Plunge" on D-Lo Brown on top of a parked car … Defeated Faarooq by disqualification in their match at the Royal Rumble when Crush, PG-13, and other members of the Nation of Domination interfered … Later in the night, Johnson eliminated himself from the Royal Rumble so that he could chase Faarooq back to the dressing room … Johnson used a wooden plank to batter Faarooq … Teamed with Savio Vega against Faarooq and Crush on January 25, 1997, at Madison Square Garden … Savio attacked Johnson during the match, causing him to get pinned, and later joined the NOD … Teamed with Rocky Maivia against Faarooq and Crush … As the war against the Nation of Domination heats up, Johnson is sure to be an important player. □



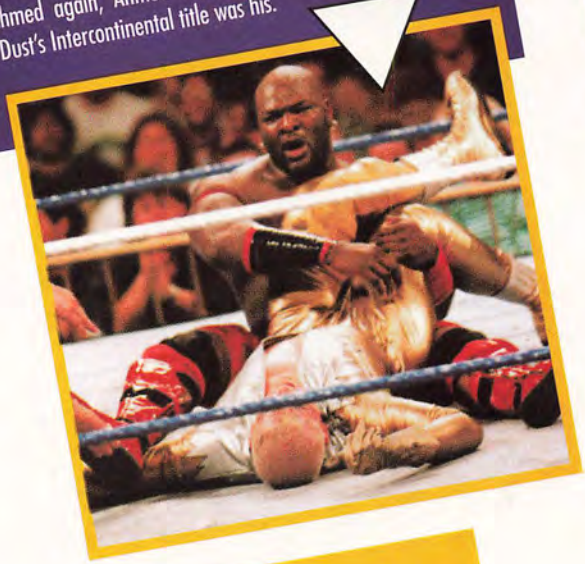
PRO Wrestling ILLUSTRATED

AHMED JOHNSON

Pearl River Powerhouse!

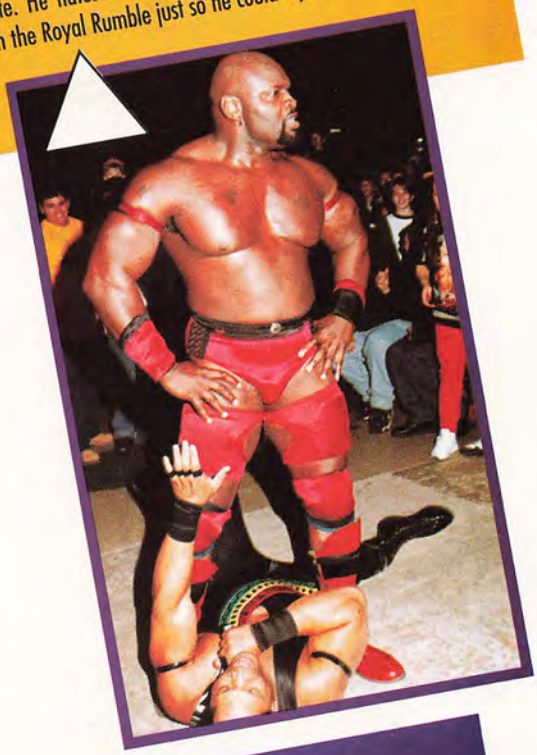
GREATEST MATCH

vs. Goldust, June 23, 1996. Don't get Ahmed angry! When he's mad, he is at his best. Several weeks before this match, Goldust infuriated him by giving him "mouth-to-mouth" while he was unconscious. The bizarre one didn't stand a chance in this bout. When he tried mouth-to-mouth on Ahmed again, Ahmed exploded, and a few minutes later, 'Dust's Intercontinental title was his.



MOST HATED OPPONENT

Faarooq. This feud is more than six months old, and it's just getting started! It began when Faarooq sneak-attacked Ahmed last July and injured his kidney so bad that Johnson had to undergo surgery, relinquish his I-C title, and take five months off to recuperate. He hates Faarooq so much that he eliminated himself from the Royal Rumble just so he could try to chase him down.

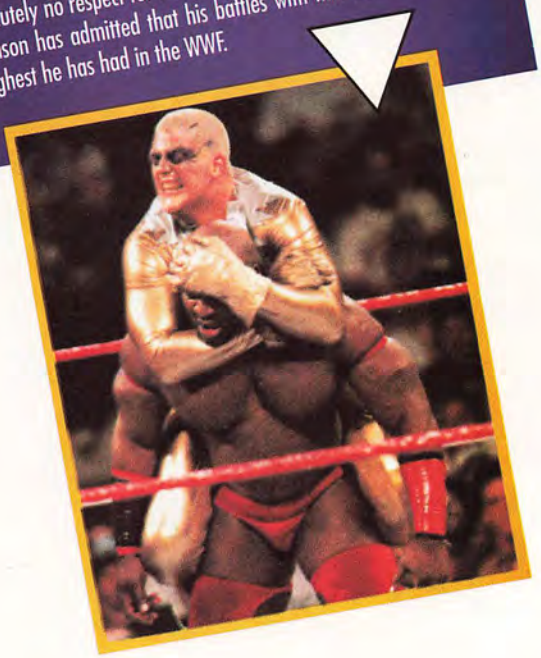


FAVORITE MANEUVER

Pearl River plunge. Ahmed Johnson will never tell you he's a great technical wrestler. He's just a strong, powerful fighter who's very, very tough to beat. One reason why is the Pearl River plunge. He'll hook his opponent's arms behind his back, lift him off his feet, and sit down himself as he drives the man's back into the mat. It's as effective as any power bomb.

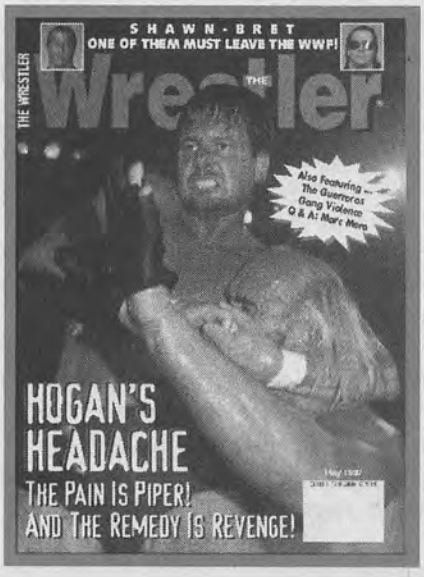
TOUGHEST OPPONENT

Goldust. Last summer, no matter how hard you tried, you couldn't get Ahmed to say anything good about Goldust. He despised the tactics 'Dust used and the mind games he tried to play. He said he absolutely no respect for the man. But now that 'Dust is on his side, Johnson has admitted that his battles with him were some of the toughest he has had in the WWF.



this month in...

The Wrestler

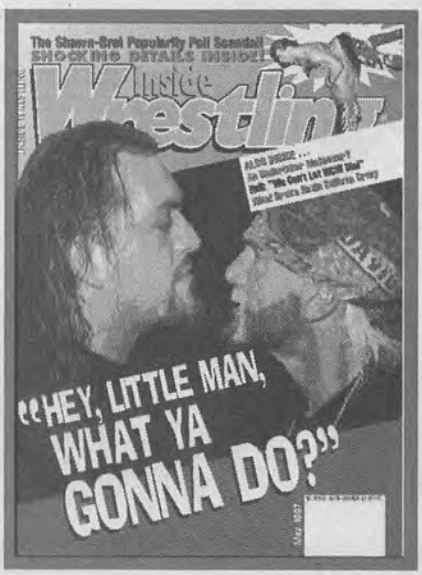


HULK HOGAN is turning into a great liar. So are the others in the NWO. They're trying to convince everyone that Hogan beat **RODDY PIPER** at Starrcade, but we all know he didn't. Deep down inside, though, he must realize the only way he can get rid of Piper is to beat him convincingly! … The **SHAWN MICHAELS-BRET HART** feud is out of hand. Would you believe that even their friends are saying one of them must leave the WWF?! … There are more supergroups in wrestling now than ever before. We'll tell you why gang violence is overrunning the sport.

All this—and much more!—in the May 1997 issue of ***The Wrestler***

NOW ON SALE!

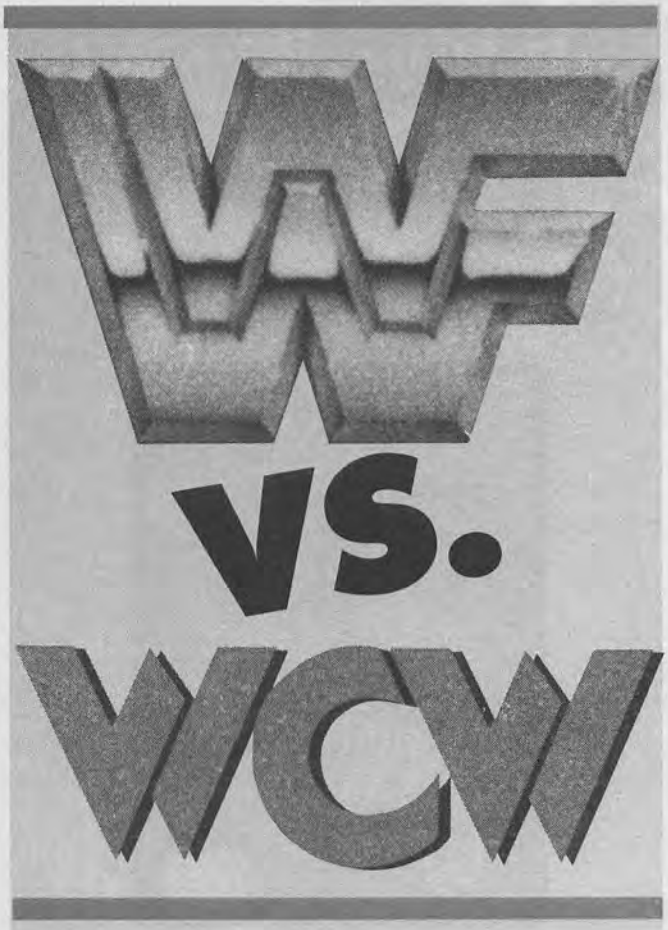
Inside Wrestling



HULK HOGAN thinks of himself as a giant killer. He beat **ANDRE THE GIANT** 10 years ago, and he has chopped down many other big men over the years, but **THE GIANT** might be the most dangerous behemoth he has ever faced. And as much Hogan wishes he would, this Giant won't go away … Had enough of the **SHAWN MICHAELS-BRET HART** feud? We thought we had covered it from every angle, until we found that someone sabotaged our Shawn-Bret popularity poll! But who? … **THE UNDERTAKER'S** image has grown stale, don't you think? We're ready for an Undertaker makeover!

All this—and much more!—in the May 1997 issue of ***Inside Wrestling***

NOW ON SALE!



Each month, PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED will take a close look at the latest developments in the WWF-WCW wars. It's your chance to get a better handle on who's winning perhaps the most crucial battle in the sport's history!

THE WWF *FINALLY* decided to do something about the Monday night ratings problem: *Monday Night Raw* is now officially a two-hour program, running head-to-head with *WCW Monday Nitro* for its entire duration.

It didn't take a genius to figure out that the WWF needed to do something to boost its ratings. It had lost every head-to-head Monday night ratings battle with WCW since *Nitro* became a two-hour show last Memorial Day. What had to be particularly disconcerting for the WWF was learning that *Raw* had been beaten soundly in the ratings by *Nitro* on the night after the Royal Rumble, one of the most important WWF pay-per-views of the year.

Question is, has this move come too late? Are too many fans too accustomed to watching two hours of *Nitro* every Monday night? And will the move be worthwhile for the WWF if it does not show *Raw* live a lot more often?

Some insiders strongly believe that the WWF does plan to run *Raw* live more often, and there is evidence to support this. In February alone, the WWF planned to air three live shows on the USA Network: the special *Thursday Raw Thursday* on February 13, a live *Raw* on February 17 (the night after an In Your House pay-per-view), and another live *Raw* on February 24 (from New York City's Manhattan Center, the original home of *Raw*).

For the past year or so, *Raw* has only been shown live approximately once a month, on nights after pay-per-views.

It will be interesting to see if WCW does anything

THE RAW-NITRO WAR

The WWF had to be somewhat encouraged by the Nielsen ratings of February 3, the night Raw became a two-hour show. Even though Raw was beaten by Nitro, the 2.6 rating was its highest since October 21, and Nitro's 3.1 was well below its average over the past few months. Unfortunately for the WWF, it lost any possible momentum when it was preempted the following week by the dog show. Nitro, incidentally, beat the dog show, 3.8-3.7.

Cumulative Nielsen numbers through February 10: Nitro—3.01; Raw—2.58.

	Date	Rating	Households	Main Event
Raw	1/20	2.2	1.55 mil.	Undertaker-Austin
Nitro	1/20	3.7	2.62 mil.	Hall-Booker T
Raw	1/27	2.2	1.53 mil.	Godwinns-'Taker/'Kind
Nitro	1/27	3.6	2.54 mil.	Hogan-Giant
Raw	2/3	2.6	1.85 mil.	'Taker/Johson-'Kind/Vader
Nitro	2/3	3.1	2.17 mil.	Heat-Steiners
Raw	2/10	(no show)		
Nitro	2/10	3.8	2.72 mil.	Guerrero-Malenko

special to counter this move by the WWF. It's also interesting to note that last year, some people in the WWF were saying that WCW was wasting a lot of money by expanding *Nitro* to a two-hour program.

Also worth noting this month is WCW's decision to venture deep into the Northeast, traditionally a WWF stronghold. Though WCW has run cards in markets such as New York and Philadelphia in the past occasionally, now it is planning to hold editions of *Nitro* in Philadelphia (April) and maybe even Boston (possibly August).

In addition, WCW held a press conference on February 4 in Montreal to announce it would be running a big card in Montreal, another big WWF city, on April 11. That card is expected to be headlined by matches pitting Jacques Rougeau Jr. against Hulk Hogan and Karl Oulette, Rougeau's partner in The Amazing French-Canadians, against The Giant. This press conference was held just a few days after a big WWF card at Montreal's Molson Centre.

And we couldn't end a "WWF vs. WCW" column without reviewing at least a few of the on-air shots the two sides have taken at each other recently.

Eric Bischoff (predictably) didn't seem too impressed by the 1997 WWF Royal Rumble, and he let *Nitro* viewers know about it. He also sarcastically chided fans of the New World Order for wearing NWO T-shirts while attending the competition's shows because it embarrasses him. He was clearly reveling in the fact that even some WWF fans are pro-NWO.

And about that Hogan-Giant match on the January 13 *Nitro*, the one that began approximately one minute before the program was to go off the air, the one whose highlights were shown during commercial breaks of *Robin Hood* on TNT afterward.

Neither WWF head Vince McMahon nor his broadcasting partner Jim Ross could resist telling viewers of *Raw* in the ensuing few weeks that they wouldn't have to wait until the last five minutes of *Raw* to see the main event and they wouldn't have to watch *Robin Hood* just to see the end of a big match.

The opportunity was just too hard to pass up.

VOICE OF THE FANS

"I think Vince McMahon should move *Raw* to another night already. Every week, *Nitro* is burying it in the ratings war. It might be taken as a sign of defeat, but you can't win all the time, and it takes a real man to know when to walk away from something futile. I could respect McMahon more if he just admitted his loss already instead of acting as if he's still winning."

SALLY HERMES
Marlton, NJ

"I think the main problem with the WWF is that it is wasting money by signing guys who don't know a lick about wrestling and need to be trained just to have a chance to make it to mid-card level. The WWF should take a hint from WCW and start signing the top independent guys before WCW gets them all."

MIKEY BRIGHT
Halifax, Nova Scotia

"WCW knows that it is the top promotion for the moment, and it is definitely starting to show. I think it is beginning to take the WWF for granted. The executives think the battle is won, but as we all know, it is far from over. The WWF will do something to surpass WCW and become the top promotion again."

PETER MERNICKI
Shartlesville, PA

"I think *Nitro* is at the peak of its popularity, and the only place for it to go is down. In recent weeks, it seems like the quality of the matches has dropped considerably and the show has become an NWO circus with Bischoff as the ringmaster. I can only hope the WCW executives realize this and do something before they are number two again."

DARREN BERSTEIN
Los Angeles, CA

They Said It!

Even with his attention focused on his work with the NWO, Eric Bischoff certainly hasn't lost sight of who his main competitor is. In an interview with Prodigy, the WCW executive vice president commented on the WWF's *Shotgun Saturday Night:* "I think it's an embarrassment to an organization that professes to be the leader in family entertainment. To date, it's the most obvious sign of desperation the WWF has exhibited in the past two years."

"Considering how bad *Raw* has been lately, I was glad when it was pre-empted by the dog show. That way I was able to dream that *Raw* would have done better than *Nitro* that week."

BILL TERRAPIN
Galveston, TX

"Thanks to this war, pro wrestling is once again allowed to be a part of mainstream society. *Nitro* definitely seems like it is the hippest place to be seen on Monday nights, while WWF pay-per-views are still the pay-per-views everyone wants to watch. If wrestling isn't influential, then why is the new Hollywood buzz word 'extreme'?"

LORETTA FAUST
Newport, KY

the steel cage

By Dave Rosenbaum

POLL REJECTS. The focus of the special section in this issue of PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED is our annual poll. Exciting stuff. We asked 50 insiders 50 pretty interesting questions, and they gave us some pretty interesting answers.

The questions consist of a lot of the basic (but very important) stuff: Who's the best wrestler, who has the best moves, does wrestling have a future, is WCW better than the WWF? The stuff wrestling fans and wrestling journalists spend a lot of time talking about.

Like I said, interesting stuff.

But not quite as interesting as it could have been had we asked the poll questions I'd love to ask ... but didn't. Such as ...

Which wrestler has the worst body odor?

Now, I don't know about you, but every time I see a sweaty wrestler in a sweaty headlock, I think, *Yuck! That must really stink.* Of course it does. People smell when they sweat, and they smell even worse when the sweat dries, so it follows that the stagnant wrestlers in tag team matches smell pretty bad when they make the tag and step into the ring.

For all appearances, Mankind or The Nasty Boys probably have the worst body odor, but I'll never know for sure, and I'm certainly not going to ask the question. Not to them at least.

Okay, here's another question: Who is wrestling's sexiest journalist?

Don't laugh. There are some pretty hot numbers out there. Brandi Mankiewicz and Liz Hunter have been getting a lot of play on the Internet. Sheila Warner hasn't been the same since Matt Brock dumped her. Stu Saks, the publisher of this magazine, has power, and they say power is the strongest aphrodisiac.

Or how about Bill Apter, the most recognized wrestling journalist in the world? Bill has made hundreds of TV appearances and once landed Letterman tickets for Missy Hyatt and Eddie Gilbert.

"There are a lot of women who

We didn't bother to ask which wrestler has the worst body odor when we put together the 1997 "*PWI* Poll." If we had, it's a good bet Mankind would have been high on the list, but frankly, the less we know about that the better.

If Woman and Elizabeth had votes, we wonder if they'd vote Bill Apter the sexiest journalist in wrestling. Maybe it's better if we didn't ask that question, either.

find Bill's hairstyle very sexy," said Brandi Mankiewicz, who doesn't put herself among that group. "And bell bottoms have made a comeback. Why can't pants halfway down your legs make a comeback?"

More questions I'd love to get the answers to ...

Which wrestler is most frequently approached by women on the road?

(My guess: Shawn Michaels.)

If you could do anything you wanted to Eric Bischoff's smug face, what would you do?

(I'd smear it with mud and then step on it a few dozen times.)

How long would it take the average person to walk around Gorilla Monsoon?

(Three months, walking fast.)

Who's the worst actor, Chris Farley, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, or Hulk Hogan?

(Hogan.)

Who would win a match between Vince McMahon and Ted Turner?

(McMahon, hands down.)

What does Debra McMichael see in Steve McMichael?

(Hey, she's not exactly a brain surgeon, either.)

Why is popcorn at wrestling matches, and all sporting events, so expensive?

Is it a good idea for female wrestlers to marry male wrestlers?

Would you want your son or daughter to get into the wrestling business?

Which is the best wrestling school in the world?

(Please stop calling the editorial offices of PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED with this one or any question like it!)

And a question we should have asked: Are wrestlers overpaid, underpaid, or paid the proper salaries? That's a question we'll save for next year, although you can guess what the responses will be: The wrestlers will say they're underpaid, the promoters will said they're either overpaid or paid the proper amount.

Which is the best wrestling venue in the world?

Which city has the best fans?

Is Hulk Hogan laughing all the way to the bank?

What size suits does Tony Schiavone wear?

Do you think Jane Fonda resents Ted Turner's involvement in wrestling?

Do you think Vince McMahon resents Ted Turner's involvement in wrestling?

Do you resent Ted Turner's involvement in wrestling?

Do you resent Jane Fonda's involvement with Ted Turner?

Woman, Kevin Sullivan, and Chris Benoit ... what's with that?

I really don't know, and I can't figure it out. Benoit has Woman. Sullivan had Woman, lost her, wants her back again. Personally, I'm sick of these wrestling love triangles.

Which leads me to my final unasked question: Wrestling—has it become *Days Of Our Lives*, or is it still a sport? □

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win lose or draw

BY ANDY RODRIGUEZ

I REMEMBER THE first time I saw Jake Roberts in the WWF. I was watching one of the federation's TV shows when Roberts came to the ring carrying a bag. Of course it was no ordinary bag of stuff; there was something moving around in there. The broadcasters didn't know what it was, and neither did I.

After conclusively defeating his opponent, Roberts reached for the bag and pulled out a snake. A big one. I laughed. I couldn't help it. I thought this was one of the most bizarre things I'd seen in wrestling. I knew Roberts was a vicious rulebreaker, but that didn't prevent me from enjoying watching "The Snake" drape his snake over his barely conscious foe.

That was back in 1985, one year before I joined the staff of *PWI*. As a reporter, I've seen a lot of craziness since then, but that moment still sticks in my mind. Because of it, Roberts will always have special place in my heart.

Which is why I became as excited as any fan when I saw "The Snake" at a mall in New Jersey recently. I wasn't the only one excited. Roberts was surrounded by admirers, dozens of them, and not one seemed concerned that he might be pestering "The Snake" on a day off.

I was surprised. I would have expected to see an occasional autograph-seeker, but not a throng. After all, he hasn't done much wrestling in the States lately. Once in a while, he appears on a WWF card, but he doesn't travel regularly on the circuit anymore. *What,* I thought, *could account for this crowd?*

I had had a similar thought several weeks earlier, when I saw Roberts compete at Madison Square Garden. He wasn't in the main event, but damned if he didn't get the biggest cheer of the night. It was an ear-opener.

After Roberts ducked into a restroom, the crowd dispersed. When he came out, I approached him. I figured I could get in a quick interview before another crowd gathered.

"Jake!" I said as I stuck out my hand. "Jake. Andy Rodriguez from *PWI*. How are you?"

"The Snake" shot me a suspicious glance. Sure, I'd interviewed him several times, but so had hundreds of other reporters. So I did what *PWI* journalists young and old have done for 20 years whenever they've encountered an obstacle. I invoked the Apter name.

"I work with Bill Apter."

"Oh, okay, yeah," he responded. "Rodriguez. I remember you. How's it going?"

Now that he knew who I was, I commented on the crowds and asked him why he remains one of the most popular competitors in the WWF.

"It is kind of funny, isn't it?" he answered. "You'd think that with all these new kids here in the WWF, the fans would've forgotten about me, but they haven't. That's very gratifying."

(Continued on page 62)

The fact that Jake Roberts always brings his snake to the ring with him must help his popularity a little. But there are so many other reasons why Jake has so many fans in the WWF.

TAKE US ON!

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2. ARMBAR
3. ARMDRAG
4. ARMLOCK
5. ARM STRETCH
6. ARM WHIP
7. ASIAN SPIKE
8. BEAR HUG
9. BITING
10. BODY SLAM
11. BODY TACKLE
12. CHICKEN WING
13. CHOKE
14. CLAW
15. CLOTHESLINE
16. CROSS BODY BLOCK
17. DOUBLE AXEHANDLE
18. DROP KICK
19. EAGLE SPLIT
20. ELBOW SMASH
21. EYE GOUGE
22. FACE RAKE
23. FIREMAN'S CARRY RAM
24. FLYING BODY PRESS
25. FLYING CLOTHESLINE
26. FLYING DROP KICK
27. FLYING ELBOW DROP
28. FLYING HEAD BUTT
29. FLYING MARE
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51. SAVATE KICK
52. SCISSORS GRIP
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54. SLINGSHOT
55. SNAP MARE
56. STEP-OVER TOE HOLD
57. SUPLEX
58. SURFBOARD
59. TURNBUCKLE SMASH
60. WRISTLOCK

SET-UP HOLDS

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63. AVALANCHE
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65. BACKROLL PRESS
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67. BIG SPLASH
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75. DDT
76. FIGURE FOUR
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83. POWER SLAM
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SPECIAL GIMMICK OR DESCRIPTION OF WRESTLER

MANAGER'S NAME (IF NOT YOU)

Wear-Down Holds: Choose 10 from the list of 60 shown at left. List them in the order to be used. Use each hold only once

1_____ 2_____ 3_____ 4_____ 5_____

6_____ 7_____ 8_____ 9_____ 10_____

Set-Up Holds: Choose 5 from the list of 30 shown at right. List them in the order to be used. Use each hold only once

1_____ 2_____ 3_____ 4_____ 5_____

Finishing Hold: Create your custom final maneuver or choose a hold from the 90 shown. Limit the length to 20 letters and spaces.

FINISHING HOLD

Opponents: Check the numbers of the men you want your wrestler to go against from the 10 at the top. Remember to enclose $1.00 for each.

1___ 2___ 3___ 4___ 5___ 6___ 7___ 8___ 9___ 10___

win, lose, or draw

(Continued from page 60)

"Maybe," I said, "after seeing so much of the WWF's new generation, they take comfort in seeing an old friend."

"That could be," Jake said. "That's something, isn't it? It wasn't too long ago that these same people hated my guts, and they had good reason to. I was one nasty guy. I'd do anything to win, and I didn't care what anyone thought."

Even as a "good guy" in his epic feud with Rick Rude, Roberts said he didn't feel any special allegiance toward those who supported him.

"It took a long time before I was willing to take a good look at myself and realize that the life I was leading just wasn't right," he said. "Yeah, I was popular, but I was paying too high a price for that popularity. Now I've got the proper perspective on things."

That perspective aided him tremendously as he battled his addictions to drugs and alcohol. It's also aided him in the ring. Roberts is not close to the top 10, but he remains a dangerous opponent. Hunter Hearst Helmsley would grudgingly agree; he nearly lost the Intercontinental title to "The Snake" in January.

"After all I've been through," said Roberts, "I'm still a player in this sport. I've proved that with the right attitude, you can overcome adversity and turn your career and your life around. I'm sure that's also what the people are responding to when they root for me."

Roberts outdistanced such men as Jushin Liger, Ahmed Johnson, and Rey Misterio Jr. to win the 1996 *PWI* Inspirational Wrestler of the Year award. One wonders if such fan support will continue if he didn't soon win a title.

"I can't worry about that," he answered. "I truly can't. Like I said, I'm really glad the people are behind me. I don't feel any pressure from them to win anything. It would be unfortunate if that changed, but it wouldn't change the way I live my life."

Despite the fact that he's only a part-time wrestler, Jake almost beat Hunter Hearst Helmsley for the Intercontinental title in January. Title or no title, people just love him.

As Roberts spoke, several kids walked up to where we were sitting and asked Jake for his autograph. As he signed, I asked a girl of about 12 why she liked Roberts so much.

"I started liking him after Jerry Lawler started saying all those rotten things about him," she said. "I knew that if Lawler didn't like him, then he had to be okay."

Soon there was a much bigger crowd around Roberts, so I decided it would be a good time to leave. I also had some shopping to finish up.

"Thanks, man," Jake said. "And tell Apter I said hello." I started with Bill and Jake finished with him.

As I left, I heard several people yelling for the snake, as though they expected Roberts to be carrying around with him a 20-foot python.

The snake. That more than anything is what defines Jake Roberts for most people. That's too bad, because there's so much more for which we should remember him. He may never again leave the ring a champion, but he'll always leave it a man. □

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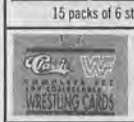

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arena reports

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UNITED STATES

ARKANSAS

LITTLE ROCK—WCW at the Barton Coliseum: **Hacksaw Duggan** beat **Big Bubba** ... **"Diamond" Dallas Page** pinned **Six** ... **Lex Luger** beat **Arn Anderson** by submission ... **Chris Benoit** wrestled **Eddy Guerrero** to a draw ... **Jeff Jarrett** defeated **Psicosis** ... **Dean Malenko** pinned **Rey Misterio Jr.** ... World tag team champs **Kevin Nash** & **Scott Hall** beat **The Nasty Boys** and **The Faces of Fear** in a non-title triangle match ... **The Giant** wrestled **Sting** to a no-contest when Nash & Hall interfered.
(01-03-97)

—Matthew Duffield

CALIFORNIA

BAKERSFIELD—Slammers Wrestling Federation at Strongbow Stadium: **Verne Langdon** defeated heavyweight champion **El Toro Bravo** by disqualification ... **Hombre de Oro** & **The Samoan Kid** beat **Joy Boy** & **Pete "Spider" Malloy** by disqualification ... **Jimmie Jaimes** beat **El Espirito** ... **Mike Ehrhardt** defeated **Tyrone Little** by disqualification ... **Diablo Valdez** pinned **Jesus Zapata**.
(01-16-97)

—Gregg John

BAKERSFIELD—Slammers Wrestling Federation at Strongbow Stadium: **The Samoan Kid** beat **El Toro Bravo** ... **Joy Boy** beat **Mike Ehrhardt** ... **Hombre de Oro** defeated **El Espirito** ... **Jimmie Jaimes** beat **Pete "Spider" Malloy** ... **Tyrone Little** pinned **Zap**.
(01-09-97)

—Gregg John

ANAHEIM—WWF at Arrowhead Pond: **Flash Funk** beat **Salvatore Sincere** ... **The Sultan** defeated **Aldo Montoya** ... **Bart Gunn** & **Henry** & **Phineas Godwinn** defeated **Owen Hart, Davey Boy Smith** & **Justin Bradshaw** ... **The Undertaker** beat **Big Van Vader** ... Intercontinental champ **Hunter Hearst Helmsley** defeated **Bret Hart** ... **Ahmed Johnson** beat **Crush** ... **Shawn Michaels** beat **Mankind** ... World champion **"Psycho" Sid Vicious** defeated **Steve Austin**.
(01-11-97)

—Jade Wright

SAN JOSE—WWF at the Arena: **Flash Funk** beat **Salvatore Sincere** ... **The Sultan** defeated **Aldo Montoya** ... **Bart Gunn** & **Henry** & **Phineas Godwinn** defeated **Owen Hart, Davey Boy Smith** & **Justin Bradshaw** ... **The Undertaker** wrestled **Big Van Vader** to a double-countout ... Intercontinental champ **Hunter Hearst Helmsley** defeated **Steve Austin** and **Bret Hart** in a triangle match ... **Ahmed Johnson** beat **Crush** ... **Shawn Michaels** beat **Mankind**.
(01-10-97)

—Valerie Kyle

LOS ANGELES—WWF at the Sports Arena: **Doug Furnas** & **Phil Lafon** defeated **The New Diesel** & **New Razor Ramon** ... **Jesse James** beat **Justin Bradshaw** ... **Faarooq** pinned **Savio Vega** ... Intercontinental champion **Hunter Hearst Helmsley** beat **Marc Mero** ... **Flash Funk** beat **Leif Cassidy** ... World tag team champions **Owen Hart** & **Davey Boy Smith** beat **Mankind** & **The Executioner** ... **Bret Hart** beat **Big Van Vader** by disqualification ... World champion **"Psycho" Sid Vicious** defeated **The Undertaker** by countout ... **Steve Austin** pinned **Shawn Michaels**.
(01-05-97)

—Randy Wilkins

SAN DIEGO—WWF at the Sports Arena: **Jesse James** beat **Justin Bradshaw** ... **Doug Furnas** & **Phil Lafon** defeated **The New Diesel** & **New Razor Ramon** ... **Flash Funk** defeated **Leif Cassidy** ... **Faarooq** defeated **Savio Vega** ... Intercontinental champ **Hunter Hearst Helmsley** beat **Marc Mero** ... **Bret Hart** beat **Big Van Vader** by disqualification ... World tag team champions **Owen Hart** & **Davey Boy Smith** beat **Mankind** & **The Executioner** ... World champion **Sid Vicious** defeated **The Undertaker** by countout ... **Steve Austin** beat **Shawn Michaels**.
(01-03-97)

—John Curran

CONNECTICUT

NEW BRITAIN—Int'l Pro Wrestling at the Sports Palace: **Dave Powers** wrestled to a 10-minute time-limit draw with **Rick Fuller** ... **The Bad Boys** beat **The Mercenary** & **Curtis Slamdawg** ... **"Handsome" Frank Stalletto** defeated **Julio Sanchez** ... **Johnny Grunge** beat **Don Montoya** ... **Ace Darling** & **Devon Storm** defeated **Reckless Youth** & **Inferno Kid**. After the match, Reckless Youth turned against Kid and brawled with guest referee **Johnny Graham** ... Heavyweight champion **Brick Bronsky** pinned **Dave Powers** ... **911** beat **Doug Flex** ... **Jimmy Snuka** beat **Hugh Morris** (substituting for **Kevin Sullivan**) by disqualification.
(01-11-97)

—Timothy A. Walker

GEORGIA

GAINESVILLE—*WCW Saturday Night* taping at the Georgia Mountains Center: **Scotty Riggs** wrestled **Jeff Jarrett** to a no-contest ... **Alex Wright** beat **Super Calo** ... **Ice Train** beat **Tombstone** ... **Hugh Morris** defeated **The Cheetah Kid** ... **Dallas Page** beat **Bobby Eaton** ... **Psicosis** defeated TV champ **Lord Steven Regal** by disqualification ... **Mike Enos** defeated **Disco Inferno** ... **La Parka** beat **Scott Armstrong** ... **Bobby Walker** & **Jim Powers** defeated **The Renegade** & **Joe Gomez** ... **Rey Misterio Jr.** beat **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** ... **Harlem Heat** beat **The Amazing French Canadians** ... **Konnan** wrestled **Big Bubba Rogers** to a double-countout in a chain match ... TV champ **Lord Steven Regal** beat **Psicosis** ... **Rick Steiner** beat **Mike Enos** ... **Hacksaw Duggan** defeated **The Gambler** ... **The Renegade** & **Joe Gomez** beat **Jim Powers** & **Bobby Walker** ... **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** beat **J.L.** ... **Bobby Eaton** beat **Disco Inferno** ... U.S. champ **Eddy Guerrero** wrestled **Six** to a double-countout in a ladder match ... **Maxx** beat **Mark Starr** ... **The Barbarian** beat **Arn Anderson** by disqualification ... **Lex Luger** beat **Scott Norton**.
(01-08-97)

—Rhonda Richards

KENTUCKY

PADUCAH—All-Star Wrestling at the National Guard Armory: **Tony Falk** won a battle royal ... **The Wild Boys** defeated **Tony Falk** & **The Drifter** ... **Krull the Deathstalker** defeated **The Pro** ... **Dennis Mason** & **The Gator** beat **Bill Manson** & **Hot Rod Biggs** by disqualification ... **The Wild Guy** beat **The New Dog** ... **Larry Valentine** & **Roy D. McCoy** defeated **The Interns**.
(01-05-97)

—Timmy Thomason

LOUISIANA

MONROE—*WCW Monday Nitro* at the Civic Center: **Glacier** beat **Bobby Eaton** ... **Konnan** beat **Big Bubba Rogers** in a strap match ... **Jeff Jarrett** beat **Arn Anderson** ... TV champion **Lord Steven Regal** wrestled to a draw with **Hacksaw Duggan** ... **Hugh Morris** beat **Jim Powers** ... **Rey Misterio Jr.** defeated **Psicosis** ... **Kevin Sullivan** beat **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** ... U.S. champion **Eddy Guerrero** beat **Alex Wright** ... **Harlem Heat** beat **The Amazing French-Canadians** ... **Lex Luger** defeated **Meng** ... **La Parka** beat **Super Calo**.
(01-06-97)

—Bryan King

MISSISSIPPI

TUNICA—USWA at the Sheraton Casino: **Shaquille Ali** defeated **Bobby Fulton** ... Tag team champs **Flash Flanagan** & **Steven Dunn** defeated **Mike Samples** & **Tony Myers** ... **Bill Dundee** & **Brian Christopher** beat **PG-13** by disqualification ... **Mabel** beat **Kareem Olajuwon** ... Heavyweight champ **Jerry Lawler** defeated **Dutch Mantel** by countout ... **Bill Dundee** won a battle royal.
(01-15-97)

—Frank Miller

NEW YORK

SMITHTOWN—Eastern Shores Wrestling at the Bulldog Arena: **The Bad Boys** defeated **Sir Adam** & **Phantom** .. **Steve Corino** pinned **The Italian Sensation** to win the light heavyweight title ... Heavyweight champion **Primo Carnera III** beat **Armageddon** ... **Tito Santana** defeated **Salvatore Sincere** ... **Gino Caruso** beat **The Metal Maniac** ... Tag team champions **Team U.S.A.** defeated **Devon Storm** & **Matty Smalls** ... Heavyweight champion **Primo Carnera III** defeated **The Sultan** by disqualification ... **Jimmy Snuka** pinned **Hercules Hernandez**.
(01-17-97)

—Michael J. DiMuzio

NEW YORK—*WWF Shotgun Saturday Night* broadcast from the All-Star Cafe: **Phil Lafon** beat **Headbanger Thrasher** ... **The New Diesel** beat **Marc Mero** ... **Faarooq** defeated **Savio Vega** ... **Rocky Maivia** beat **The New Razor Ramon** ... **Phil Lafon** & **Doug Furnas** defeated **The Headbangers**.
(01-11-97)

—Bobbi Alsvan

NEW YORK—*WWF Shotgun Saturday Night* broadcast at the Mirage Nightclub: **The Sisters of Love** (managed by **Brother Love**) beat **Henry** & **Phineas Godwinn** ... **Goldust** (with **Marlena**) beat **The Sultan** (managed by **Mr. Bob Backlund**) by countout ... **Ahmed Johnson** beat **Crush** by disqualification when the **Nation of Domination** interfered ... **Mascarita Sagrada** defeated **Mini Vader** (managed by **Jim Cornette**).
(01-04-97)

—Ted Markley

NORTH CAROLINA

MOORESVILLE—Pro Wrestling Federation at the Armory: **Flaming Youth** defeated **Black Dragon** ... **Black Angel** beat **Overlord Blade** ... **Chris Hamrick** beat **Dr. Feelgood** in a ladder match ... **Madd Maxxine** & **George South** beat **Italian Stallion** & **The Body Adonis**.
(01-19-97)

—Brock Chandler

GASTONIA—PWF at the Armory: **Cruel Connection II** & **Flaming Youth** beat **The Overlords** in the finals of a tournament for the vacant PWF tag team title ... **Firebreaker Chip** beat Eastern States champion **Terry Austin** to win the title ... PWF champ **Italian Stallion** beat **George South**.
(01-18-97)

—Brock Chandler

SELMA—Atlantic Coast Championship Wrestling at the Selma-Smithfield Middle School: **Rip Curl** pinned **Henry Dean** ... **Surge** defeated **Will o' the Wisp** ... **Venom** beat **David Renegade** ... **Gorgeous George III** defeated **The Viper** in a chain match ... **Greg Valentine** beat **Mike Maverick**.
(01-10-97)

—Joe Wheeler

MEADOW—ICW at the Elementary School: **The Good Ol' Boy** beat **The Bounty Hunter** ... **Youth Gone Wild** defeated **Lex Reed** ... **"Iron Man" Mike Majors** defeated **Dr. Johnny Dollars** ... **Dark Starr** beat **Agent Steel** ... Tag team champions **Rob McBride** & **D.C. Queen** defeated **The Army of Aggression** ... **Major Justice** defeated heavyweight champion **Marc Ash** by disqualification.
(01-18-97)

—Marcus Watkins

SYLVIA—American Championship Wrestling at the Armory: **Chuck Justice** beat **Craig Farmer** ... **All American T.C.** beat **Billy Jackson** ... **Johnny Red Cloud** wrestled **Jay Eagle** to a double-countout ... **J.D. Sullivan** & **Ricky Rockett** defeated **Terminator Rex** & **The Carolina Heartbreaker** ... **Mike Murphy** defeated **K.C. Thunder** by disqualification ... **Wildman Johnson** beat **Abe Jacobs** ... **The ACW Executioner** beat **Rick Savage** by countout.
(01-18-97)

—Dan Parris

KANNAPOLIS—Carolina Championship Wrestling at Rodeo's Nightclub: **David Osbourne** defeated **Nick of Time** ... **Tim Jackson** beat **Kevin Kirby** ... **L.A. Stephens** defeated **Will Shooter** ... **Sweet Dreams** beat **The Mercenary** ... **The Ringlords** defeated **Scotty Piper** & **The Rebel** ... **Madd Maxx, Rodeus Tony**, & **Willie Clay** beat **The Spoiler, Cannon**, & **One Man Posse** ... **Michael Nimmons, Gary Royal**, & **Pez Whatley** beat **David Isley, Big Cheese**, & **Colt Steele**.
(01-17-97)

—Dan Parris

PIKEVILLE—IPWA at the Charles B. Aycock High School: **Steve Corino** & **Adam Flash** beat **Mark Schrader** & **Joey Matthews** ... **Ralph Soto** pinned **Doink** ... **Malia Hosaka** beat **Debbie Combs** ... **Darkside** beat **Death** & **Destruction** & **Tommy Rodman** ... **Cueball Carmichael** pinned **Christian York** ... **Jason Knight** beat **J.T. Smith** ... **Big Slam** pinned **Guido Falcone** to win the vacant heavyweight title.
(01-11-97)

—Michael J. DiMuzio

KINGS MOUNTAIN—PWF at the Armory: **Gladiator II** defeated **Flaming Youth** ... **The Overlords** beat **The Black Dragons** ... **Cruel Connection II** defeated **Wasted Youth** ... Heavyweight champ **Italian Stallion** beat **George South** by disqualification.
(01-10-97)

—Brock Chandler

CONCORD—CCW at the Hartsell School Gym: **David Osbourne** beat **Nick of Time** ... **The Cruel Connection** defeated **David Isley** & **The Big Cheese** ... **Star Ryder** defeated **Leon El Gigante** ... **Tim Jackson, Will Shooter**, & **Colt Steele** defeated **Killer Force II, Dr. Dreadd**, & **Kevin Kirby** ... **Ringlord Rick Slagle** beat **The Panther** ... **Gary Royal** beat **Ringlord Speedy Gonzalez** by disqualification ... **One Man Posse** & **The Cannon** beat **Madd Maxx** & **Willie Clay** by countout.
(01-04-97)

—Dan Parris

ELKIN—AIWF at the National Guard Armory: **Stallion** & **Jammer** beat **Dr. Love** & **Tommy Devylin** ... **Neil Leathers** & **The Enforcer** defeated **Aries** & **J.T. Sledge** ... **Robert Roma** beat lightweight champion **King Cobra** for the belt ... **Black Knight** & **Cyclone** beat **Scorpion** & **Unknown**

(Continued on page 66)

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arena reports

(Continued from page 65)

Soldier ... TV champion **Rick Deezel** beat **Sgt. Butch Steel** ... **Johnny Reb** beat U.S. champion **Major Breakinridge** by disqualification ... **Major Havoc** beat **Brian Danzig** in a pole match ... Tag team champions **The Ghost Riders** beat **The Tennessee Violence Authority** by disqualification when **Robert Roma** interfered.
(01-04-97)

—Dean Puckett

WALLACE—ICW/NWC at the Armory: **Agent Steel** beat **Darrell Brewer** ... **Chris Pardue** defeated **Youth Gone Wild** ... **Army of Aggression** defeated **Rob McBride** & **Chris Starr** in a first-round match of a tournament for the vacant NWC tag team title ... **D.C. Queen** beat **The Texas Outlaw** in an "I Quit" match ... NWC champion **Rage** beat **The Prophet** ... ICW champ **"Mean" Marc Ash** wrestled **Major Justice** to a 60-minute time-limit draw.
(01-04-97)

—Marcus Watkins

WAYNESVILLE—Great American Wrestling Federation at the Rec Center: **Sweet Dreams** won a battle royal ... Tag team champions **The Terminators** defeated **Sweet Dreams** & **The Grungemaster** ... U.S. champion **Major DeBeers** beat **Ox Brubaker** ... **Medic Madness** defeated **Mana Mojo** & **Boris Dragoff** ... **Mighty Heidi** pinned **Lady Assassin**.
(01-04-97)

—Aimee Tucker

OKLAHOMA

OKLAHOMA CITY—Power Zone Wrestling Alliance at the National Guard Armory: **Wild Maverick** pinned **Rick Valentine** ... **The Nightmare** wrestled **Tom Jones** to a no-contest ... **The Oklahoma Kid** wrestled **Country Boy Chopper** to a draw ... **Slash** pinned **Damian Kincaid** ... **Treach Phillips** defeated **Psycho** ... **Shawn Summers** beat **Casey Cannon** in an "I Quit" match.
(01-17-97)

—Clark Peterson

PENNSYLVANIA

SCRANTON—Extreme Championship Wrestling at the Catholic Youth Center: **Mikey Whipwreck** beat **Chris Van de Lay** ... **Mike Awesome** defeated **David Jericho** ... **Axl Rotten** & **D-Von Dudley** beat **Bubba Ray** & **Spike Dudley** ... **New Jack** defeated **B. Mahoney** ... **Tommy Dreamer** & **Beulah McGillicutty** defeated **Shane Douglas** & **Francine** ... **Stevie Richards** defeated **Little Guido** ... Tag team champions **The Eliminators** beat **Axl Rotten** & **D-Von Dudley** ... **Pit Bull II** wrestled **Brian Lee** to a no-contest ... ECW champ **Raven** beat **The Sandman**.
(01-18-97)

—Kevin Dunlap

PHILADELPHIA—ECW at the Taber Youth Center: **Axl Rotten** defeated **Little Guido** ... **Brian Lee** beat **David Jericho** ... Tag team champions **The Eliminators** beat **Spike** & **Bubba Ray Dudley** ... **Stevie Richards** & **The Blue Meanie** defeated **The Bad Crew** ... **New Jack** defeated **D-Von Dudley** ... **Super Nova** beat **Chris Van de Lay** ... **The Sandman** defeated **B. Mahoney** ... **Chris Candido** beat **Mikey Whipwreck** ... **Pit Bull II** & **Tommy Dreamer** defeated **Raven** & **Shane Douglas**.
(01-17-97)

—Jake Armando

PHILADELPHIA—ECW at the ECW Arena: **The Sandman** beat heavyweight champion **Raven** in a non-title bout ... **Chris Candido** beat **Louie Spicolli** ... **Mikey Whipwreck** defeated **Spike Dudley** ... Tag team champions **The Eliminators** beat **Axl Rotten** & **D-Von Dudley** ... **The Gangstas** defeated **Rick Morton** & **Tommy Rich** ... **Tommy Rich** defeated **Rick Morton** in an impromptu match ... **Mike Awesome** beat **B. Mahoney** ... **Bubba Ray Dudley** wrestled **Pit Bull II** to a no-contest ... **Brian Lee** beat **Terry Funk** ... **Pit Bull I** defeated ECW TV champ **Shane Douglas** by countout.
(01-11-97)

—Kevin Greer

WIND GAP—Pennsylvania Championship Wrestling benefit show at the Plainfield Township Fire Company: **Cheetah Master** defeated **Maxx Crimson** ... **Chef D.Z. Gillespie** beat **Vinnie Biondo** ... **Jacques Bonet** wrestled **Romeo Catino** to a double-countout ... **Cheetah Master** won a battle royal to advance in the BattleBrawl tournament ... **Pat Shamrock** beat **Diablos Macabre** to win the Junior heavyweight title ... **Mr. Ooh La La** beat **The Cremator** ... **Mark Mest** beat **Kid Liberty** ... **Mark Mest** won a battle royal to advance in the BattleBrawl tournament ... **Cheetah Master** beat **Mark Mest** to win the BattleBrawl tournament and a shot at Americas champion **Lance Diamond** ... **Dave Patera** beat **Col. Jihad Hussein** ... Americas champion **Lance Diamond** beat **Cheetah Master** ... **Boogie Woogie Brown** beat **King Kong Bundy** by disqualification.
(01-11-97)

—Jeremy Wilson

NORTH VERSAILLES—Pro Wrestling Express at the Wrestleplex: **The Giant Hillbillies** beat **John** & **Shirley Doe** ... **The Xtreme Militia** defeated **Black Cat** & **Big Daddy Adams** ... **T. Rantula** defeated **Quinn Magnum** ... **Paul Atlas** beat **Leviathan** ... Tag team champions **J.B. Destiny** & **Dennis Gregory** beat **Bonecrusher** & **Mad Mike Jester** ... North American champion **Lou Marconi** beat **Bubba the Bulldog** ... Heavyweight champ **Brian Anthony** pinned **Sheriff Steele**.
(01-04-97)

—Jeff Gorman

SOUTH CAROLINA

GAFFNEY—PWF at the Armory: Junior heavyweight champion **Madd Maxxine** beat **The Body Adonis** ... **Black Angel** defeated **Bulldog** ... **Chris Hamrick** beat **Dr. Feelgood** ... Heavyweight champ **Italian Stallion** defeated **"Gorgeous" George South**.
(01-11-97)

—Brock Chandler

GREENVILLE—Southern Championship Wrestling at Westley's Nightlife: **J.J. Justice** pinned **Kid Dynamite** ... **Brody Ray Chase** defeated **The Russian Assassin** by disqualification ... **The Desperado** beat **The Nightmare** ... **Shane Austin** beat **J.J. Justice** ... Tag team champs **The House of Pain** wrestled **Devastation Inc.** to a double-countout.
(01-06-97)

—Joe Wheeler

GREER—PWF at the Armory: Junior heavyweight champion **Madd Maxxine** beat **Black Angel** ... **The Overlords** defeated **Chris Hamrick** & **Wasted Youth** ... **Cruel Connection II** defeated **Bulldog** ... Heavyweight champion **Italian Stallion** defeated **"Gorgeous" George South**.
(01-03-97)

—Brock Chandler

TENNESSEE

FALL BRANCH—Southern States Wrestling at the Sampson Center: **Danny Christian** defeated **Mike Cooper** ... **Bam Bam Christian** wrestled **Stan Lee** to a draw ... **Debbie Combs** & midget **Bad Boy Buck** defeated **Brandi Wine** & manager **The Duke** ... Appalachian champion **Beau James** defeated **Eddie Golden** ... **Eddie Golden**, **Bam Bam Christian**, & **Danny Christian** beat **Beau James**, **Stan Lee**, & **Mike Cooper**.
(01-17-97)

—Fay Ferguson

FALL BRANCH—SSW at the Sampson Center: **Super Mario** beat **Mike Cooper** ... **Danny Christian** defeated **Swede Stone** ... **Dan Cooley** & **Tim Cooper** defeated **K.C. Thunder** & **Iceman** (with **Count Grog**) .. **Danny Christian** & **Johnny Thunder** defeated **Justin St. John** & **Steve Flynn** to win the tag team title ... **Beau James** & **Brandi Wine** defeated **War Machine** & **Debbie Combs**.
(01-03-97)

—Fay Ferguson

MEMPHIS—USWA at the Big One Expo Center: ***One-night tournament to earn a shot at heavyweight champion Jerry Lawler later on the card. First round:*** **Mike Samples** beat **Koko B. Ware** ... **Bill Dundee** defeated **Wolfie D** ... **Mabel** beat **Akeem Muhammad** ... **Shaquille Ali** beat **Brian Christopher** ... ***Semifinals:*** Dundee beat Samples ... Ali beat Mabel ... ***Final:*** Ali defeated Dundee ... Tag team champs **Flash Flanagan** & **Steven Dunn** beat **PG-13** by disqualification ... Heavyweight champion **Jerry Lawler** pinned **Shaquille Ali**.
(01-16-97)

—Mark Mitchell

MEMPHIS—USWA at the Big One Expo Center: **Kareem Olajuwon** defeated **Bobby Fulton** ... Tag team champions **Steven Dunn** & **Flash Flanagan** defeated **Vic the Bruiser** & **Mike Samples** ... **Bill Dundee** beat **Wolfie D** by disqualification ... **Jerry Lawler** defeated **Dutch Mantel** by disqualification ... **Mabel** beat **Sir Mohammed** in a lumberjack match ... Southern champion **Brian Christopher** beat **Shaquille Ali**.
(01-09-97)

—Mark Mitchell

TEXAS

SAN ANTONIO—WWF Royal Rumble pay-per-view at the Alamo Dome: **Mascarita Sagrada** & **La Parkita** beat **Mini Vader** & **Mini Mankind** at 10:20 ... Intercontinental champion **Hunter Hearst**

(Continued on page 68)

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Helmsley pinned **Goldust** at 16:40 ... **Ahmed Johnson** defeated **Faarooq** by disqualification at 8:20 when **Crush, PG-13,** and other members of the **Nation of Domination** interfered ... **Big Van Vader** pinned **The Undertaker** at 13:20 ... **Perro Aguayo, Canek,** & **Hector Garza** beat **Jerry Estrada, Fuerza Guerrera,** & **Heavy Metal** at 11:23 ... **Shawn Michaels** beat World champion **Sid Vicious** at 13:42 to regain the title ... **Steve Austin** won the 30-man Royal Rumble. Here is a list of the participants, the time of their elimination, and who they were eliminated by: **The New Razor Ramon** at 2:18 by **Ahmed Johnson** ... Ahmed at 2:58, self-eliminated when he left to chase **Faarooq** back to the dressing room ... **Crush** at 6:10 by **Phineas Godwinn** ... Phineas at 6:28 by **Steve Austin** ... **Bart Gunn** at 7:10 by Austin ... **Jake Roberts** at 9:33 by Austin ... **The Sultan** at 16:18 by **Davey Boy Smith** ... Smith at 17:50 by **Owen Hart** ... **Cibernetico** at 21:33 by **Mil Mascaras** ... Mascaras at 22:00, self-eliminated after diving off the top rope onto Cibernetico, who was on the floor ... **Hunter Hearst Helmsley** at 22:22 by **Goldust** ... Goldust at 24:15 by Owen ... **Latin Lover** at 25:01 by Faarooq ... Faarooq at 25:20 after Ahmed Johnson ran into the ring with a wooden plank and chased him out ... Owen Hart and **Marc Mero** at 25:50 by Austin ... **Savio Vega** at 26:50 by Austin ... **Jesse James** at 28:11 by Austin ... **Jerry Lawler** at 31:05 by **Bret Hart** ... **Flash Funk** at 44:45 by **Big Van Vader** ... **Henry Godwinn** at 47:43 by **The Undertaker** ... **Rocky Maivia** at 48:25 by **Mankind** ... **Terry Funk** by at 49:14 by Mankind ... Mankind at 49:20 by The Undertaker ... Austin at 50:04 by Bret Hart (the referees, trying to break up a fight on the floor between Terry Funk and Mankind, did not see Austin eliminated, and he returned to the ring) ... Undertaker and Vader at 50:07 by Austin ... **The New Diesel** at 50:23 by Bret ... Bret at 50:27 by Austin.
(01-19-97)

—Brandon Apter

SAN ANTONIO—SWCW at the El Torito Ballroom: **Roughneck** beat **El Colombiano** ... **Mr. Wrestling III** wrestled **Solomon Grundy** to a draw ... **Mad Dog Johnson** beat **Chief Lightfoot** ... **Juan Reynosa** beat **Bobby Perez** when **Mad Dog Johnson** interfered.
(01-10-97)

—Brett Wolfe

EL PASO—WWF at the Civic Center: **Flash Funk** beat **Salvatore Sincere** ... **The Sultan** beat **Aldo Montoya** ... **Henry** & **Phineas Godwinn** & **Bart Gunn** defeated **Owen Hart, Davey Boy Smith,** & **Justin Bradshaw** ... **The Undertaker** defeated **Big Van Vader** ... Intercontinental champion **Hunter Hearst Helmsley** defeated **Bret Hart** ... **Ahmed Johnson** defeated **Crush** ... **Shawn Michaels** beat **Mankind** ... World champ **Sid Vicious** defeated **Steve Austin.**
(01-13-97)

—Tracey Orthan

VIRGINIA

BASSETT—AIWF at the Community Center: **Easy Rider** & **Cyclone** beat **Robert Roma** & **Diamond Dave** ... **The Enforcer** defeated **Johnny Reb** ... **J.T. Sledge** beat **Aries** ... **Brian Danzig** wrestled **Butch Steel** to a double-countout ... **The Good Ol' Boy** beat U.S. champion **Major Breckenridge** by disqualification ... **Black Knight** beat **Major Havoc** ... TV champion **Rick Deezel** beat **Neal Leathers** in a bullrope match ... In the finals of the "War Zone Iron Man" tournament, **Don Carson** defeated **Chris Windham** in a lumberjack strap match.
(01-18-97)

—Dean Puckett

INTERNATIONAL

CANADA

MONTREAL, QUEBEC—Northern Championship Wrestling at the NDR Arena: **Frank Blues** beat **Phil Belanger** ... **Esel Krap** beat **The Gentleman** ... **Mike Lyons** defeated **The Ninja** ... **Marc the Grizzly** defeated **Alexander the Magnificent** to win the Inter-City title ... **Dream Killer** & **The Gentleman** beat **El Diablero, Ivan the Terrible,** & **Mike the Fan Boy** by disqualification in a handicap match ... **The Sweet Boys** beat **The Dream Warriors** ... **Frank Blues** beat **Golem the Giant.**
(01-18-97)

—Bertrand Hebert

WINNIPEG, MANITOBA—Canadian Wrestling Federation at Chalmers Community Center: Junior heavyweight champ **J.T. Atlas** beat **Chad Ripley** by countout ... **Vance Nevada** pinned **Jeffrey Donovan** ... **Spice Richards** beat **Bobby Collins** to win the CWF North American junior heavyweight champion ... **Bobby Jay** beat North American champ **Robby Royce** in a non-title match .. **Brian Jewel** & **The Iron Man** defeated **Wildman Firpo** & **Alex Rain** ... **Bugsy Sluggliano** beat **Brother Midnite.**
(01-16-97)

—Vern May

WINNIPEG, MANITOBA—CWF at the Vince Leah Community Center: **Spice Richards** wrestled **Chad Ripley** to a double-countout ... **Brian Jewel** wrestled **J.T. Atlas** to a draw ... **Caveman Broda** beat **Alex Rain** ... **Ironman** beat **Bobby Collins** ... **Bugsy Sluggliano** beat **Vance Nevada** ... CWF champ **Robby Royce** pinned **Bobby Jay** ... **Vance Nevada** won a battle royal.
(01-11-97)

—Verne May

WINNIPEG, MANITOBA—CWF at Chalmers Community Center: **Chad Ripley** beat **Spice Richards** ... **Iron Man** wrestled **Bobby Collins** to a double-disqualification ... **Bobby Jay** & **Dave Levinsky** defeated **Brother Midnite** & **J.T. Atlas** ... **Caveman Broda** & **Steve Stryker** defeated tag team champions **Todd Bullet** & **Bobby Collins** (substituting for **Wildman Firpo**) ... **E.Z. Ryder** pinned **Vance Nevada** in a lumberjack match ... North American champion **Robby Royce** defeated **Bugsy Sluggliano** in a steel cage match.
(01-02-97)

—Verne May

BURLINGTON, ONTARIO—Renegade Wrestling Alliance matinee card at the Appleby Mall: **"Sweet" Steve Hart** beat **G. Rease** ... **One Man Wrecker** defeated **Corporal Punishment** ... **K.O. Carter** & **Steve Titan** beat tag team champions **The Hollywood Hunks** by disqualification ... Heavyweight champion **"Wildcat" Jamie Jackson** pinned **L'Artiste** (**Jimmy "Superfly" Snuka** was special guest referee).
(01-04-97)

—Jeff Gorman

JAPAN

TOKYO—New Japan at the Tokyo Dome: **Satoshi Kojima, Osamu Nishimura, Kurasawa,** & **Junji Hirata** defeated **Yuji Nagata, Takashi Iizuka, Osamu Kido,** & **Kazuo Yamazaki** ... **Super Liger** pinned **Koji Kanemoto** ... **Hakushi** pinned **Michiyoshi Ohara** ... **Shinjiro Otani** pinned **Yoshihiro Tajiri** ... **Masa Chono** pinned **Shoji Nakamaki** ... **Masa Saito** beat **Great Kojika** ... **Antonio Inoki** defeated **Willie Williams** by submission ... **Jushin Liger** defeated **Ultimo Dragon** to win eight of the belts held by Dragon.
(01-04-97)

—Koichi Yoshizawa

TOKYO—All-Japan at Korakuen Hall: **Hiroshi Hase** pinned **Maunakea Mossman** ... **Yoshinobu Kanemaru** & **Mighty Inoue** defeated **Kentaro Shiga** & **Saturo Asaki** ... **Mitsuo Momota, Rusher Kimura,** & **Giant Baba** defeated **Jun Izumida, Haruka Eigen,** & **Masanobu Fuchi** ... **Rob Van Dam** & **Sabu** beat **Yoshinari Ogawa** & **Tsuyoshi Kikuchi** ... **Maunakea Mossman** won a battle royal ... **Johnny Ace** & **Steve Williams** beat **The Lacrosse** & **Gary Albright** ... **The Eagle, Jumbo Tsuruta,** & **Kenta Kobashi** defeated **Bobby Duncum Jr., Takao Omori,** & **Stan Hansen** ... **Masao Inoue, Toshiaki Kawada,** & **Akira Taue** defeated **Tamon Honda, Jum Akiyama,** & **Mitsuharu Misawa.**
(01-03-97)

—Koichi Yoshizawa

THIS MONTH IN HISTORY JANUARY

NEW YORK

NEW YORK—WWWF at Madison Square Garden: World champion **Bruno Sammartino** beat **Prof. Tanaka** by disqualification ... **Spiros Arion** wrestled **Gorilla Monsoon** to a draw ... **El Toro** pinned **The Ox** ... **The Sheik of Araby** defeated **Smasher Sloan** ... **Arman Hussein** defeated **Ricki Sexton** ... **Miguel Perez** and **Tank Morgan** wrestled to a draw ... **Eduardo Carpentier, Bobo Brazil,** & **Antonio Pugliese** beat **Dr. Bill Miller, Baron Scicluna,** & **Luke Graham.**
(06-19-67)

—PWI archives

NORTH CAROLINA

RALEIGH—NWA'S Great American Bash tour at Dorton Arena: **Mike Rotundo** pinned **Brian Pillman** ... **Norman the Lunatic** defeated **Scott Hall** ... **The Dynamic Dudes** beat **New Zealand Militia** ... **The Midnight Express** defeated **Ron Simmons** & **"Mean" Al Green** ... **The Great Muta** beat **Eddie Gilbert** by countout ... **Sting** won a two-ring battle royal, last eliminating **Rick Steiner** ... **Terry Funk** defeated **Sting** by forfeit ... **The Freebirds** fought **The Steiners** & **Steve Williams** to a double-disqualification ... **The Road Warriors** beat **The SST** ... **Lex Luger** pinned **Ricky Steamboat.**
(06-26-89)

—Jason Summers

TEXAS

DALLAS—Global Wrestling Federation at the Sportatorium: **The Blue Flame** beat **Bam Bam Richardson** ... **Action Jackson** defeated **Randy Rhodes** ... **Black Bart** & **John Hawk** beat **Brave Sky** & **Crazy Mike** by disqualification ... **Angel** defeated **Dick Murdoch** ... **Ray Evans** beat **Calvin Knapp** ... **Chris Adams** defeated **Alex Porteau** ... **Plowboy Wilbur** defeated **Vito Mussolini** ... **Crazy Mike** beat **Killer Brooks.**
(06-04-93)

—PWI archives

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(Continued from page 5)

Beulah McGillicutty and Francine have gotten into some tussles in mixed ECW matches lately, and they've held their own against a few men. Reader Harold Pawlik saw Beulah use a moonsault and wants to see her in the "*PWI* 500."

Jushin Liger overcame adversity and wrestled after having a brain tumor removed. Second runner-up Ahmed Johnson was able to persevere and return after having surgery to repair an injured kidney. Finally, third runner-up Rey Misterio Jr. showed that a little guy can make an impact by dazzling fans with an arsenal of high-flying and death-defying moves.

It's nice to know something good came out of 1996 instead of just awful things like the "Billionaire Ted" fiasco.

MICHAEL SMITH III
Bridgeport, MA

WHAT ABOUT BEULAH?

Reader John Feeney wrote a letter saying that Francine should have been in the "*PWI* 500" this year ("More '500' Feedback," March 1997), but I think Beulah McGillicutty deserved consideration, too. She and Tommy Dreamer beat Francine and Shane Douglas in some mixed tag matches. During one match, Beulah even used a moonsault on Francine! I've never really seen Francine execute a real wrestling move. Beulah's moonsault wasn't great, but she did execute it as well as she could. Maybe this will get Beulah into the next "*PWI* 500."

HAROLD PAWLIK
Erie, PA

RAVIN' ABOUT RAVEN

Everyone always focuses on Raven's bad attitude and track record with women, but I think he's a tremendous wrestler. He is always among the elite of ECW, and he does whatever it takes to keep the ECW heavyweight belt when he has it. So he is a tad self-centered. He has good reason to be that way: He's the heavyweight champion of the world's toughest federation. Raven might not treat women very well, but I think that is because he loves the ECW belt more than them. Hey, who could blame him?

KEVIN BAWNE
Hagerstown, MD □

ECW heavyweight champion Raven doesn't hear many cheers when he piledrives The Sandman, but reader Kevin Bawne believes fans should respect him for what he has accomplished in that federation.

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(Continued from page 37)

has big plans to turn his fortunes around. How, you ask? Consider that under Bearer's tutelage, The Undertaker became one of the WWF's premier wrestlers. The former WWF champ has for years been a solid, dependable, driven grappler who never betrays his fans and never puts on a subpar performance. Bearer has also helped to transform Mankind from just another ugly face into one of the federation's most vicious and dangerous wrestlers, even more vicious and dangerous than he was before he arrived in the WWF.

In essence, Bearer has done to 'Taker and Mankind what the Mad Doctor did to the seamed monster—he gave them life.

So what specifically will he do for Vader? Well, the pallid one gave fans a taste of his underhanded tactics during 'Taker's match with Vader at the Royal Rumble. During the match, Bearer interfered and goaded 'Taker into chasing him round and round. Amidst the confusion, Vader took the opportunity to assault Undertaker and pin him.

Yes, these two monsters of the night do think alike. That's why you can expect anything and everything from the Bearer-Vader combo, both inside and outside the ring. The mere fact that no one can understand why these two are together will work to their advantage. You should expect the unexpected.

"Not only will Bearer bring out the most vile and underhanded aspects of Vader's nature, he'll improve Vader as a wrestler by boosting his self-esteem," said noted wrestling psychologist Dr. Sidney M. Basil. "You don't think someone like Mr. Vader would have a self-esteem problem, but I've seen it in men similar to him. He needs to resuscitate his deeply submerged anger."

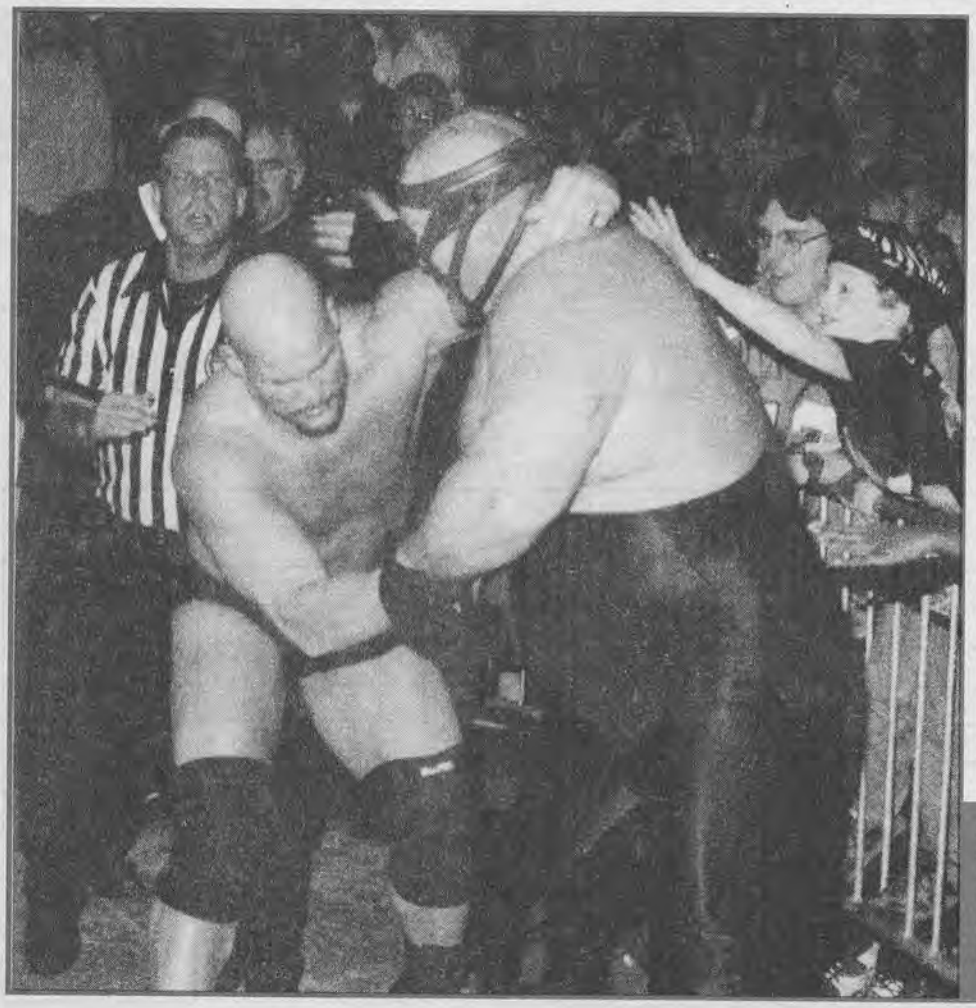
Several WWF fan favorites also said Bearer is very adept when it comes to teaching his charges how to pace themselves, how to preserve energy until an opponent is near exhaustion. They insist they saw him working on these things with Undertaker when the two of them were together.

Surely everyone remembers how Bearer used the urn to control Undertaker. By convincing 'Taker that his power was derived from the urn, he controlled him like a puppeteer manipulates a marionette. And Undertaker never knew the difference. Of course, 'Taker and Mankind are more docile than Vader; it may not be so easy for Bearer to control him.

Even during his drought, though, Vader was involved in top-notch matches. He remains one of the most sought-after grapplers east of the Berlin Wall. But that figured to change if he didn't change.

He needs a winner to guide him. It's that simple. He needs a manager who will give him his undivided attention and nurture him.

And believe it or not, that manager is Bearer. □



A few victories over Austin should be enough to earn Vader a title shot or two in the WWF. Bearer ought to make sure he keeps Vader focused on that goal of winning the WWF championship.

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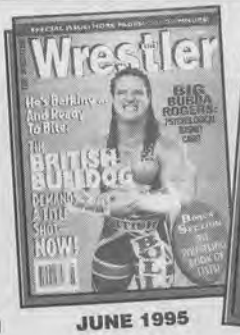

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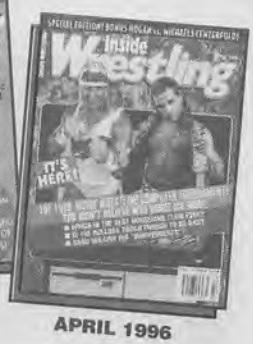

APRIL 1996

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JUNE 1995 *WRESTLER* is 88-pages full of information, including an 18-page "Book Of Lists" section featuring the hottest lists in wrestling and full-color pages of Jeff Jarrett, Hulk Hogan, Sid Vicious, and Sabu.

DECEMBER 1995 *WRESTLER* lays down the law in a special 20-page rulebook developed by the editors. This section includes four color pinups depicting flagrant rules violations.

MARCH 1996 *WRESTLER* is an 88-page edition including the most memorable, the violent, and bizarre moments from 1995 in a special "Year In Pictures" section, with four full-color pages featuring major issue from the year.

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JULY 1995 *INSIDE WRESTLING* is a power-packed 88-pager (including four color pinups) that included our popular "Wrestling Cool" section. Who's the coolest dude, babe, crippler, and daredevil? One thing all our readers agreed on: This issue was cool!

OCTOBER 1995 *INSIDE WRESTLING* reports on the state of affairs of World Championship Wresting for the first half of 1995 in "WCW Midyear Report." We tell you how the stars fared among the turmoil in this special 88-page edition that includes four full-color pinups.

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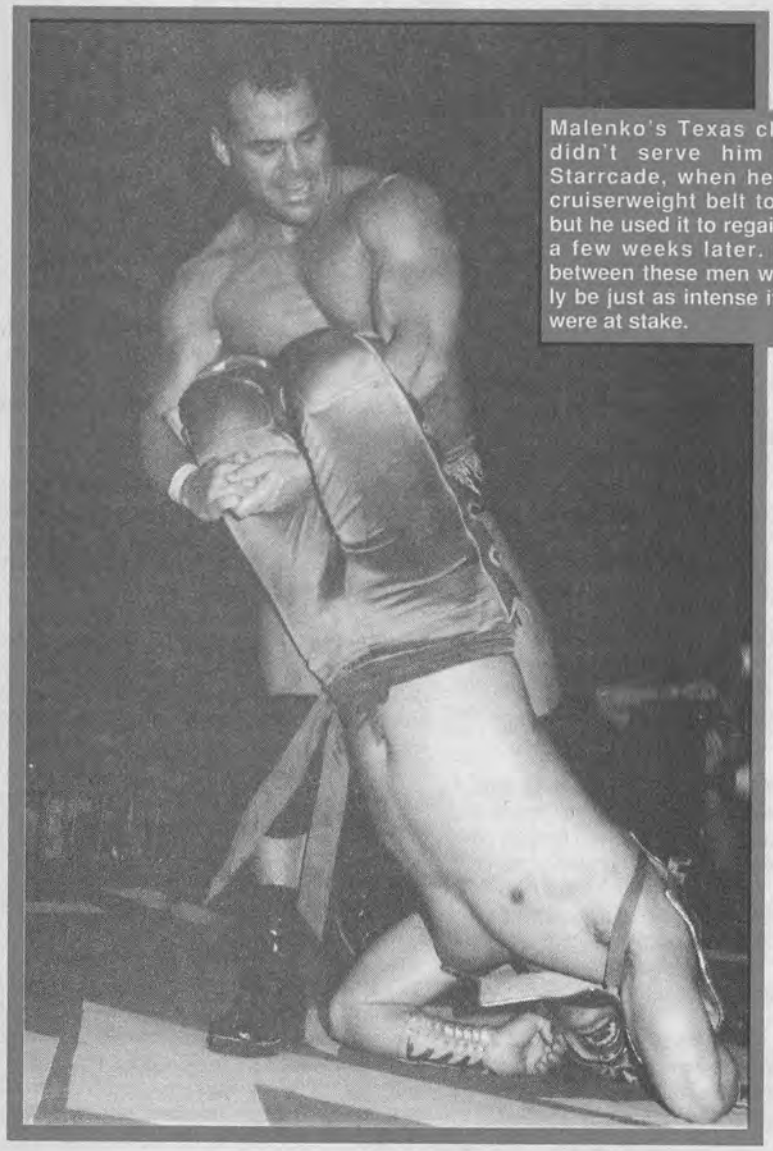


Malenko's Texas cloverleaf didn't serve him well at Starrcade, when he lost the cruiserweight belt to Dragon, but he used it to regain the title a few weeks later. Matches between these men would likely be just as intense if no titles were at stake.

sions. The first attempt was stopped by Dragon, the second by Sonny Ono's interference.

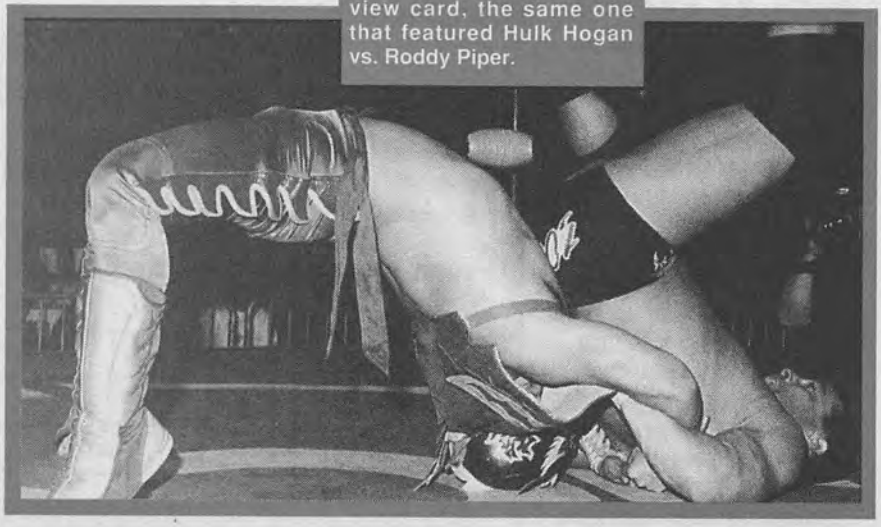
The end came quickly. Dragon caught Malenko in a double-underhook combined with a variation of the Tiger suplex. Three seconds later, a new cruiserweight champion was crowned. The final tally was eight two-counts and one three-count. Only that three-count mattered to Ultimo Dragon and to the fans. But it wasn't necessarily because Dragon had become the owner of nine belts.

"It was nice to see a clean victory after Ono's shenanigans," said Tim Albers, 23, of Memphis. "Both Dragon and Malenko were winners no matter who walked out as the champion. This is a classic."

Less than a month later at Clash of the Champions, we got another classic, even though fewer belts were at stake. Dragon had just lost the J-Crown to Jushin Liger. Only his WCW cruiserweight belt was at stake against Malenko. Just like at Starrcade, gold switched hands. And just like at Starrcade, that might have been the least significant part of an amazing match, at least where fans were concerned.

"My goal that night was to get back my title," said Malenko. "I would have done anything, but when I'm wrestling someone like Dragon and we're going hold for hold, I get in a zone, and I tend to forget about the titles involved. The competition just gives you such a rush."

So back to our original question: Does the belt make the man, or does the man make the belt? Maybe it's not that easy. Let's just say the matches make the man, and the man makes the belt. □



Dragon used a punishing Tiger suplex to beat Malenko at Starrcade. Many fans considered this the best match on that pay-per-view card, the same one that featured Hulk Hogan vs. Roddy Piper.

JUST FOUND!

BACK ISSUES OF THE ORIGINAL WCW MAGAZINE

Collectors agree that the early issues of WCW MAGAZINE were some of the most superb wrestling magazines ever published. Until recently, these magazines had been neatly stored in an air-controlled warehouse. Now, once again, they are available to the public!

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Cover: Special Holiday Issue!
Poster: 1992 calendar/wrestlers' birthdays

MARCH 1992*
Cover: 1991 awards/year in review
Poster: Dustin Rhodes

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Plus: Boss, Orndorff & Roma

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JULY 1994
Cover: Sting
Plus: Flair, Nastys, Vader-Jack

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(Continued from page 39)

crowd right now. Stay out of my way. I don't want nothing to do with you anymore. My fans will just have to live with that. If they want to continue cheering Savio Vega, then so be it, but I don't think they're smart enough to appreciate what I am doing. I could not care less. I hate them, so they should hate me, too.

LENKER: What about Ahmed Johnson?

VEGA I never liked Ahmed Johnson. He tries to be this big hero to all the kids. But he's just a punk and a thug. He always talked about doing the right thing, and then he would attack people with a board. Great role model. What I did to him is what he has done to everyone else. He was asking for it.

MANKIEWICZ: Everyone seems to have a role in the Nation of Domination. What's yours?

VEGA: I will do whatever Mr. Mason thinks is best for me. Faarooq is our leader, so that's taken care of. My experience and talents have always brought me success. Now, with the Nation of Domination, the sky is the limit.

ANDERSON: But won't the situation be the same as it has been before? How can you demand the spotlight when it is constantly on Faarooq and Mason? After all, they started the NOD.

VEGA: You think I'm stupid? Clarence Mason has made promises to me, and he is a man of his word. Every group needs a leader and, for now, that is Faarooq. I am there for him when he needs me. He feels the same way. Besides, what everybody is talking about is the Nation of Domination taking over.

MANKIEWICZ: I think that you're thinking of another acronym of a wrestling organization that starts with "N."

VEGA: Lady, you are pushing my buttons. You better watch it.

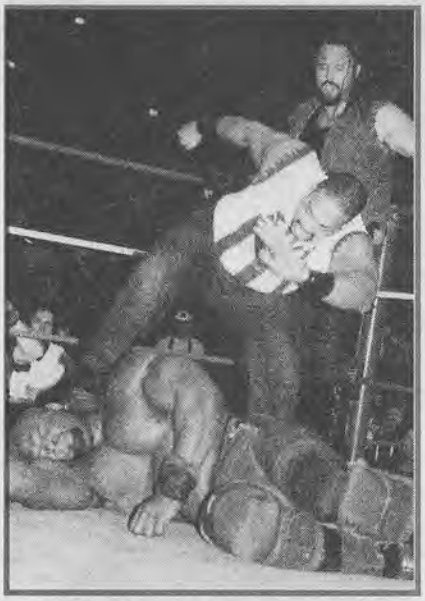
Savio and Faarooq wrestled against each other during the January 25 tag team match at Madison Square Garden (above), but after turning against partner Ahmed Johnson, Savio relentlessly stomped him (opposite page, right). He says Ahmed had it coming.

LENKER: So for the past few years, you feel that you have been putting on an act or something? Is this the real Savio Vega that's finally come out?

VEGA: I like to think I finally found myself. I have been fooling myself since I came to the WWF. I am a fighter. I am a renegade, not a company man. And I don't need fans for anything. My real personality is an ideal fit for the Nation of Domination. It took Clarence Mason to bring it out of me.

ANDERSON: Real personality?

VEGA: A man who doesn't care about rules. A man who will do anything to win. A man who is devoted to an organization that is looking out for his best interests. It wasn't a personality change. It was a ...



MANKIEWICZ: Brainwashing?

VEGA: What did you say?

MANKIEWICZ: All I am saying is that for the past two years, you have been prancing around the ring and playing to the fans. Now, out of nowhere, you decide that you've had enough just because things aren't going your way? Hardly true rulebreaker motivation.

VEGA: So you're the expert. Look, lady, you can't get into my head. You don't know what I'm thinking or what I'm really like. I'm taking advantage of my opportunities. When the WWF gave me an opportunity, I took it. Who wouldn't? When Mr. Mason gave me an opportunity, I took it. Trust me when I say that I am dedicated to our group.

LENKER: I've heard a rumor that you guys are after Rocky Maivia now, that you've been actively recruiting him.

VEGA: Maybe we are. If he's smart, he'd beg us to take him. Same for everybody in the WWF.

ANDERSON: Any final thoughts to leave with the fans on the "new" Savio?

VEGA: Just tell them I don't care about them anymore. For the first time in my career, I am happy. I am finally able to be myself. I know who my friends are and who my enemies are. From this point on for Savio Vega, my life is dedicated to the Nation of Domination. If you don't like it, just stay out of my way and you won't get hurt. □

"Watch yourself ... I get the feeling he's gonna try to pin you right away!"

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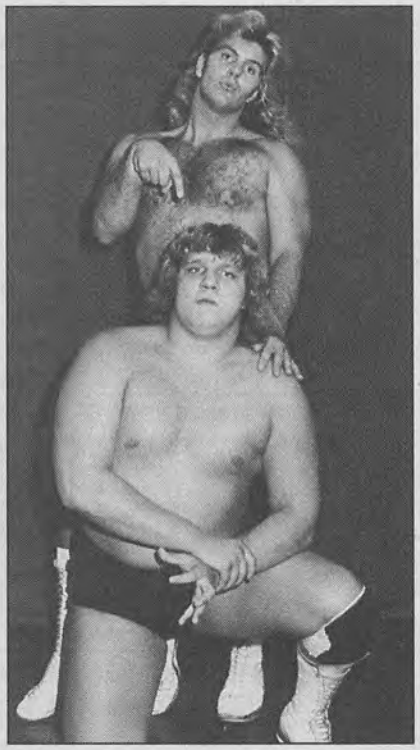


BORN TO BE A BROADCASTER?

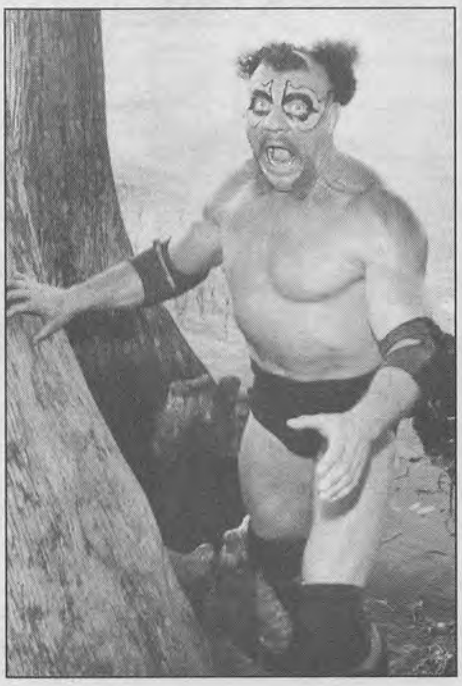
Terry Gordy hasn't changed all that much in the 18 years that have passed since this picture was taken, but that other guy sure has. New name, new haircut, new job, a few more pounds added. It's your favorite Freebird, Michael "P.S." Hayes, better known today as WWF broadcaster Dok Hendrix.

WHAT AN ORIGINAL TITLE!

If you're going to make a movie about a wrestler, why not call it *The Wrestler?* The people who made this 1973 film did. This scene featured Edward Asner and AWA legend Verne Gagne. Gagne did a good job in the movie, but his performance wasn't quite worthy of an Academy Award nomination.

REASON ENOUGH TO MAKE SURE YOUR KIDS NEVER GO TO PARKS IN FLORIDA ALONE

Imagine taking the family to a park in Orlando ... you know, you're just planning on having a nice, relaxing picnic. Then you decide to take a leisurely stroll by the water and you run into ... *this! The Missing Link!* It's the stuff nightmares are made of!



"WELL, YOU KNOW SOMETHING, MOM ..."

Could you see this sweet, innocent little boy spray-painting people's backs, telling fans they could "stick it," and beating up people who for years had proudly called themselves his friends? A few years ago, we wouldn't have thought so, either. But this young, innocent little boy is now more hated than any wrestler in North America. That's right, it's "Hollywood" Hulk Hogan!

Every other month, ***Pro Wrestling Illustrated*** *will pore through its massive photo collection to bring you some of the most unique photographs the mat world has ever seen!*

AND THE CRYSTAL BALL SAYS ...

The Grand Wizard and Dr. Jerry Graham were friends for a long, long time, but it wasn't until near the end of Graham's career that they formed a partnership. That crystal ball might have indicated to the Wizard that they were going to have a bright manager-wrestler future together, but they didn't, though they always remained friends. Graham died of complications from a stroke in January; Wizard died in 1983.

"HAVE A SEAT, JACKIE, YOU'VE EARNED IT!"

Jackie Fargo looked exhausted yet thrilled after his match with Rocky Cookson in Chattanooga, Tennessee, in December 1963. Jackie was never shy, so he simply took a seat next to these two surprised ladies and smiled. And for good reason. He wanted to get a close look as his beaten opponent got his head shaved.

A *REALLY* MIGHTY ATLAS

When wrestlers today lock hands in the middle of the ring to see who the stronger man is, we usually call it a "test of strength." Right. What Mighty Atlas used to do during cards in Texas was to invite fans into the ring to test his strength. Now *this* is a test of strength. He usually won these tugs-o'-war.

THAT'S NOT A TOOTHBRUSH

Before big matches, your average wrestler will stretch out, maybe have a last-minute strategy session with a manager, maybe listen to some inspirational music. Not being your average wrestler, Pampero Firpo often chose to use a file to sharpen his teeth. Most of his opponents wished he hadn't!

PRO Wrestling ILLUSTRATED

PWI's Top 10

TOP 10

1 SHAWN MICHAELS
234, San Antonio, TX
(1) WWF World champion

2 LEX LUGER
265, Chicago, IL
(7) No. 3 contender: WCW World title

3 BRET HART
235, Calgary, Alberta
(6) No. 2 contender: WWF World title

4 THE GIANT
430, parts unknown
(2) No. 2 contender: WCW World title

5 STEVE AUSTIN
241, Dallas, TX
(3) No. 3 contender: WWF World title

6 DEAN MALENKO
216, Tampa, FL
(9) WCW cruiserweight champion

7 SID VICIOUS
318, West Memphis, AR
(4) No. 4 contender: WWF World title

8 HUNTER HEARST HELMSLEY
279, Greenwich, CT
(8) WWF Intercontinental champion

9 RAVEN
235, Short Hills, NJ
(10) ECW heavyweight champion

10 EDDY GUERRERO
221, El Paso, TX
(5) U.S. heavyweight champion

The Godwinns

TAG TEAMS

1 RICK & SCOTT STEINER
Combined weight: 483 pounds
(5) No. 1 contenders: WCW World tag title

2 SCOTT HALL & KEVIN NASH
Combined weight: 646 pounds
(2) WCW World tag team champions

3 OWEN HART & DAVEY BOY SMITH
Combined weight: 472 pounds
(1) WWF World tag team champions

4 DOUG FURNAS & PHIL LAFON
Combined weight: 475 pounds
(3) No. 1 contenders: WWF World tag title

5 THE ELIMINATORS
Combined weight: 459 pounds
(6) ECW tag team champions

6 THE GIANT & LEX LUGER
Combined weight: 695 pounds
(-) No. 2 contenders: WCW World tag title

7 HENRY & PHINEAS GODWINN
Combined weight: 531 pounds
(7) No. 2 contenders: WWF World tag title

8 HARLEM HEAT
Combined weight: 550 pounds
(4) No. 3 contenders: WCW World tag title

9 PG-13
Combined weight: 471 pounds
(-) USWA tag team champions

10 THE BARBARIAN & MENG
Combined weight: 589 pounds
(8) No. 4 contenders: WCW World tag title

WCW

World Champion:
HULK HOGAN
(C) 275, Venice Beach, CA

1—EDDY GUERRERO
(1) 221, El Paso, TX
2—THE GIANT
(2) 430, parts unknown
3—LEX LUGER
(3) 265, Chicago, IL
4—LORD STEVEN REGAL
(5) 247, Blackpool, England
5—DEAN MALENKO
(4) 216, Tampa, FL
6—JEFF JARRETT
(8) 230, Nashville, TN
7—CHRIS BENOIT
(9) 218, Edmonton, Alberta
8—DIAMOND DALLAS PAGE
(7) 260, Tampa, FL
9—SIX
(6) 212, Minneapolis, MN
10—ARN ANDERSON
(–) 249, Minneapolis, MN

WWF

World Champion:
SHAWN MICHAELS
(C) 234, San Antonio, TX

1—HUNTER HEARST HELMSLEY
(1) 279, Greenwich, CT
2—BRET HART
(4) 235, Calgary, Alberta
3—STEVE AUSTIN
(3) 241, Dallas, TX
4—SID VICIOUS
(2) 318, West Memphis, AR
5—AHMED JOHNSON
(7) 255, Pearl River, MS
6—THE UNDERTAKER
(8) 328, parts unknown
7—BIG VAN VADER
(5) 450, Denver, CO
8—FAAROOQ
(9) 260, Perry, GA
9—GOLDUST
(6) 254, Austin, TX
10—ROCKY MAIVIA
(–) 272, Pearl City, HI

USWA

USWA Champion:
JERRY LAWLER
(C) 234, Memphis, TN

1—BRIAN CHRISTOPHER
(1) 230, Memphis, TN
2—WOLFIE D
(3) 250, parts unknown
3—BILL DUNDEE
(4) 219, Melbourne, Australia
4—DUTCH MANTEL
(2) 224, Oil Trough, TX
5—MABEL
(7) 568, Harlem, NY
6—TRACEY SMOTHERS
(6) 227, Atlanta, GA
7—STEVEN DUNN
(–) 240, Tampa, FL
8—KAREEM OLAJUWON
(8) 215, Memphis, TN
9—J.C. ICE
(5) 221, Memphis, TN
10—MO
(9) 285, Harlem, NY

ECW

ECW Champion:
RAVEN
(C) 235, Short Hills, NJ

1—SHANE DOUGLAS
(2) 240, Pittsburgh, PA
2—THE SANDMAN
(1) 244, Philadelphia, PA
3—PIT BULL II
(4) 231, Philadelphia, PA
4—TOMMY DREAMER
(3) 245, Yonkers, NY
5—STEVE WILLIAMS
(–) 265, Norman, OK
6—TERRY FUNK
(–) 247, Amarillo, TX
7—SABU
(–) 220, Bombay
8—CHRIS CANDIDO
(6) 226, Carteret, NJ
9—ROB VAN DAM
(–) 227, Battle Creek, MI
10—BRIAN LEE
(5) 251, Los Angeles, CA

OFFICIAL RATINGS

Top 10 and Tag Team ratings are based on won-lost records for the past month, quality of opposition, and inherent skill of each wrestler or team. These ratings are compiled by the magazine's editorial board. Most Popular and Most Hated ratings are based on nationwide telephone and arena surveys of wrestling fans and on the volume and character of mail that comes to our offices. All other ratings are based on the official current positions of challengers to the top title in each category; certain titleholders receive an automatic spot in the ratings. The number in parentheses indicates a wrestler's position in that category last issue; (-) indicates that the wrestler was not rated in that category last issue. while (C) indicates the wrestler was champion in that category last issue.

MOST POPULAR

1. **RODDY PIPER**
   247, Glasgow, Scotland
   Last issue: No. 3 Most Popular
2. **SHAWN MICHAELS**
   234, San Antonio, TX
   Last issue: No. 5 Most Popular
3. **THE GIANT**
   430, parts unknown
   Last issue: No. 1 Most Popular
4. **AHMED JOHNSON**
   255, Pearl River, MS
   Last issue: No. 2 Most Popular
5. **THE UNDERTAKER**
   328, parts unknown
   Last issue: No. 6 Most Popular
6. **LEX LUGER**
   265, Chicago, IL
   Last issue: No. 4 Most Popular
7. **BRET HART**
   235, Calgary, Alberta
   Last issue: No. 7 Most Popular
8. **EDDY GUERRERO**
   221, El Paso, TX
   Last issue: No. 8 Most Popular
9. **DIAMOND DALLAS PAGE**
   260, Tampa, FL
   Last issue: No. 10 Most Popular
10. **THE SANDMAN**
    244, Philadelphia, PA
    Last issue: unrated

MOST HATED

1. **HULK HOGAN**
   275, Venice Beach, CA
   Last issue: No. 1 Most Hated
2. **STEVE AUSTIN**
   241, Dallas, TX
   Last issue: No. 2 Most Hated
3. **SCOTT HALL**
   290, Miami, FL
   Last issue: No. 3 Most Hated
4. **KEVIN NASH**
   356, Detroit, MI
   Last issue: No. 5 Most Hated
5. **SAVIO VEGA**
   260, Vega Alta, Puerto Rico
   Last issue: unrated
6. **KEVIN SULLIVAN**
   252, Boston, MA
   Last issue: No. 6 Most Hated
7. **HUNTER HEARST HELMSLEY**
   279, Greenwich, CT
   Last issue: No. 4 Most Hated
8. **SIX**
   212, Minneapolis, MN
   Last issue: No. 8 Most Hated
9. **RAVEN**
   235, Short Hills, NJ
   Last issue: unrated
10. **FAAROOQ**
    260, Perry, GA
    Last issue: No. 7 Most Hated

For period ended February 7, 1997

CUMULATIVE RATINGS

These ratings are based on the past 10 issues of this magazine. We have examined our ratings for each of these issues in our Top 10 and Tag Team categories only, and assigned each position a point value: 10 points for a first-place rating, nine for second place, and so on. The point values for all wrestlers in the past 10 issues have been compiled, with a possible maximum of 100 points. Each issue we'll present the top five finishers in each category. While our regular ratings reflect the past month, these cumulative ratings give an indication of wider trends in the sport.

SINGLES

1—SHAWN MICHAELS .....93 points
2—THE GIANT.....62 points
3—LEX LUGER.....50 points
4—SID VICIOUS.....41 points
5—STING .....34 points

TAG TEAMS

1—HARLEM HEAT .....64 points
2—SCOTT HALL & KEVIN NASH .....64 points
3—OWEN HART & DAVEY BOY SMITH.....61 points
4—HENRY & PHINEAS GODWINN.....52 points
5—RICK & SCOTT STEINER.....48 points

NEW JAPAN

IWGP Champion:
SHINYA HASHIMOTO
(C) 287, Gisu, Japan

1. **JUSHIN LIGER**
   (1) 206, Hiroshima, Japan
2. **ULTIMO DRAGON**
   (2) 175, Mexico City, Mexico
3. **ANTONIO INOKI**
   (4) 240, Tokyo, Japan
4. **SHINJIRO OTANI**
   (5) 215, Yokohama, Japan
5. **RIKI CHOSHU**
   (9) 246, Yamaguchi, Japan
6. **KOJI KANEMOTO**
   (–) 205, Tokyo, Japan
7. **THE GREAT MUTA**
   (3) 245, Tokyo, Japan
8. **MASA CHONO**
   (6) 235, Tokyo, Japan
9. **HIROYOSHI TENZAN**
   (10) 270, Tokyo, Japan
10. **KENSUKE SASAKI**
    (–) 233, Tokyo, Japan

ALL-JAPAN

Triple Crown Champion:
KENTA KOBASHI
(C) 261, Tokyo, Japan

1. **KENTA KOBASHI**
   (1) 261, Tokyo, Japan
2. **YOSHINARI OGAWA**
   (2) 202, Fichigi, Japan
3. **JUN AKIYAMA**
   (4) 230, Hiroshima, Japan
4. **AKIRA TAUE**
   (3) 265, Tokyo, Japan
5. **TOSHIAKI KAWADA**
   (5) 245, Tizhigi, Japan
6. **TAKAO OMORI**
   (7) 221, Tokyo, Japan
7. **STAN HANSEN**
   (8) 322, Borger, TX
8. **JOHNNY ACE**
   (–) 250, San Bernadino, CA
9. **SABU**
   (6) 220, Bombay
10. **ROB VAN DAM**
    (10) 227, Battle Creek, MI

CENTURY WRESTLING ALLIANCE: Champion—Kevin Sullivan; **1**—Tony Rumble; **2**—Vic Steamboat; **3**—Tony Atlas; **4**—King Kong Bundy; **5**—Doink the Clown; **6**—Knuckles Nelson; **7**—Steve Corino; **8**—Salvatore Sincere; **9**—Mohammed Hussein; **10**—Pink Assassin.

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION: Champion—Glen Osbourne; **1**—Ace Darling; **2**—Cheetah Master; **3**—Lance Diamond; **4**—Viper; **5**—Boogie Woogie Brown; **6**—Mr. Ooh La La; **7**—Inferno Kid; **8**—Kid Flash; **9**—Dr. Destruction; **10**—Commando.

HARDCORE CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: Champion—Larry Valentine; **1**—Ben Jordan; **2**—Prozac Jac; **3**—Mr. Hardcore; **4**—Quinton Querisma; **5**—Troy Eaton; **6**—Gary Valiant; **7**—Tracey Smothers; **8**—Hot Rod Biggs; **9**—Steven Dunn; **10**—Sheik.

INT'L PRO WRESTLING: Champion—Brick Bronsky; **1**—Bam Bam Bigelow; **2**—Frank Stalletto; **3**—911; **4**—Julio Sanchez; **5**—Rocco Rock; **6**—Johnny Grunge; **7**—Reckless Youth; **8**—Doug Flex; **9**—Jimmy Snuka; **10**—Inferno Kid.

NATIONAL WRESTLING LEAGUE: Champion—John Rambo; **1**—Bob Starr; **2**—King Kong Bundy; **3**—Mabel; **4**—Nikolai Volkoff; **5**—Shane Shadows; **6**—Switchblade; **7**—Big Slam; **8**—Blackhawk; **9**—Corp. Punishment; **10**—Young Lust.

PENNSYLVANIA CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: Champion—Julio Sanchez; **1**—Lance Diamond; **2**—Cheetah Master; **3**—Glen Osbourne; **4**—Pat Shamrock; **5**—Ace Darling; **6**—Mark Mest; **7**—Boogie Woogie Brown; **8**—Maxx Crimson; **9**—D.Z. Gillespie; **10**—Diablos Macabre.

PRO WRESTLING FEDERATION: Champion—Italian Stallion; **1**—George South; **2**—Flaming Youth; **3**—Madd Maxxine; **4**—Terry Austin; **5**—Carolina Dreamer; **6**—Cruel Connection II; **7**—Star Ryder; **8**—Chris Hamrick; **9**—Masked Maniac; **10**—Gladiator II.

SOUTHERN CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: Champion—Gorgeous George III; **1**—Boris Dragoff; **2**—Tracy Smothers; **3**—Southern Viper; **4**—Major DeBeers; **5**—Jimmy Valiant; **6**—Roger Anderson; **7**—Frank Parker; **8**—Jimmy Cicero; **9**—Beau James; **10**—Jimmy Torture.

UNITED STATES WRESTLING FEDERATION: Champion—King Kaluha; **1**—Frank Stalletto; **2**—Salvatore Sincere; **3**—Libyan Terrorist II; **4**—Steve Corino; **5**—Jimmy Snuka; **6**—Mike Stark; **7**—Chip Stetson; **8**—L.A. Gore; **9**—Doink; **10**—Lord Zoltan.

RATINGS ANALYSIS

Every month, this column will tell fans how we go about rating over 200 wrestlers in 19 different categories. It is a behind-the-scenes look at the most important–and respected–ratings system in the sport. This column is vital reading for all wrestling fans.

Top 10 talk. It took only a few months for **Shawn Michaels** to reclaim his spot atop our ratings, a position he held through much of the summer and fall. The reason why is obvious. At the Royal Rumble, "The Heartbreak Kid" regained the WWF World title that he had lost to **"Psycho" Sid Vicious** at Survivor Series. Yes, he did get a little help from a TV camera to win the match, but who in the WWF *isn't* cheating to win matches these days?

Sid Vicious

But lately we have received a lot of mail about some of the other superstars who are (or are not) in our top 10. A few samples:

I read all your magazines, wrote Christopher Elkinson of Los Angeles, *but I have a real problem with your ratings. You guys must have something against the NWO because I rarely see* ***Hulk Hogan's*** *name in the top 10, and he's the WCW World champion.* ***Scott Hall, Kevin Nash,*** *and* ***Six****—they never make it either. We're talking here about some of the greatest wrestlers in the world. These guys belong in the top 10 every issue.*

Why isn't Hulk Hogan in the top 10 in your ratings? inquired Randolph Jeter of Independence, Missouri. *Look who he's wrestled in the last few months. He beat* ***The Giant*** *for the WCW belt, he beat* ***Randy Savage*** *at Halloween Havoc, he's taken on* ***Lex Luger*** *and* ***Roddy Piper****. We're talking about some of the top names in the sport.*

I don't see how guys like ***Rey Misterio Jr., Raven, The Sandman,*** *and* ***Dean Malenko*** *consistently make your top 10,* wrote Scott Franklin of Portland, Oregon. *I'm not saying they're not good wrestlers or anything—they definitely are—but they don't belong ahead of people like* ***The Undertaker*** *or* ***Big Van Vader****, or people like that.*

Since we have received these letters and many similar to them, we figured it would be a good time to address some of the issues brought up in them.

Hogan has only made rare appearances in our overall top 10 of late because he just doesn't wrestle enough. He makes sure he only has to defend the WCW belt a minimum number of times. True, he did beat Savage at Halloween Havoc, and that was a title match, but he got help from the NWO. His reluctance to put the belt on the line against The Giant cost him a 7'4", 430-pound ally, and the first time he wrestled The Giant after the big man broke away from the NWO, Hogan and **Eric Bischoff** made certain it was a non-title match.

The Giant

The same thing was true for the match with Piper at Starrcade. "Hollywood" Hogan convinced Bischoff to use his power as WCW senior vice president to make sure that, too, was a non-title match. Good thing for Hogan, too, since he lost the bout cleanly. Hogan must be *much* more of a fighting champion if we are to include him in our overall top 10 on a regular basis.

That said, we should point out that we are *not* saying that Hogan would lose to all the wrestlers who do make the overall top 10. In fact, we're not sure how he'd do against the likes of Malenko, Misterio, or Raven if he were ever matched up against them. But we must give these other wrestlers their due.

Malenko, for instance, is now a three-time WCW cruiserweight champion who is always willing to put his title on the line. Misterio did the same when he was cruiserweight champ, and both Raven and Sandman have been fighting champions in ECW. They did a lot to earn spots in the top 10.

As for the question about Hall, Nash, and Six and why we don't put them in the top 10, well, that's simple. Until late-January, neither Hall nor Nash had wrestled singles since the formation of the NWO. They deserved to be at the top of our tag team ratings because they were the WCW World tag team champions, but until they pick up some significant singles wins, we can't put them in the singles top 10. As for Six, he has wrestled singles since joining the NWO, but he hasn't won enough significant matches to warrant inclusion in that top 10.

Hope this has helped! If you have any questions or comments about anything you see on this page or in our ratings, we want to hear from you. Write to: "Ratings Analysis," c/o PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED, Box 1148, Fort Washington, PA 19034. □

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[NOTE: Cover stories noted in boldface.]

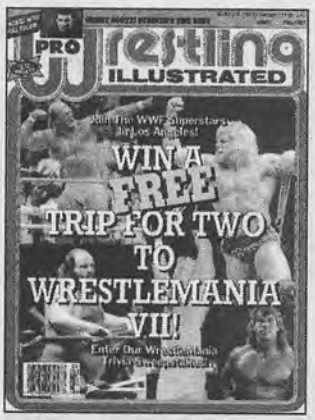
February 1988/CENTERFOLD: Ronnie Garvin. **Savage & Elizabeth,** Garvin, Von Erichs, Freebirds.

April 1989/CENTERFOLD: Rick Steiner. **Randy Savage,** Ted Turner, Richter, Paul E., Powers of Pain.

December 1990/CENTERFOLD: Sting. **New WWF Blood,** Four Horsemen, Kerry, Doom, Gilbert, Slaughter.

January 1991/CENTERFOLD: Kerry Von Erich. **WWF vs. NWA,** Hogan, Hansen, Sting, Sherri & Warrior.

February 1991/CENTERFOLD: 1991 calendar. **WrestleMania,** Vicious, DiBiase-Rhodes, Steiner, Power & Glory.



May 1991/CENTERFOLD: Arn Anderson. **Hulk Hogan,** Rude, Flair-Sting, Thesz.

June 1991/CENTERFOLD: Hacksaw Duggan. **Hulk Hogan,** Cactus, Flair, Nasty Boys, Steiner.

January 1993/CENTERFOLD: Jeff Jarrett. **Flair/Summerslam,** Simmons by Bowden, Von Erich interview.

February 1993/CENTERFOLD: Curt Hennig. **Ramon,** Snuka-Muraco, Rude, Rhodes, Roberts interview.

April 1993/CENTERFOLD: Barry Windham. **Steiners,** Backlund, Sting-Muta, Hawk-Sasaki.

November 1993/CENTERFOLD: The Steiners. **WCW Midyear Report,** Doink, Funk-Gilbert, Race, Yokozuna.

January 1994/CENTERFOLD: Jerry Lawler. **Doink,** Nasty Boys, Steiners, Cornette, Vicious.

May 1994/CENTERFOLD: Tatanka. **Yokozuna-Luger,** Flair-Vader, Heenan, WrestleMania retrospective.

July 1994/CENTERFOLD: Rick Steamboat. **Razor Ramon,** Flair-Regal, Cactus, Lawler, Yokozuna workout.

August 1994/CENTERFOLD: Doink & Dink. **Bret Hart/WrestleMania X,** Steiners, Albano, steroid trial.

November 1994/CENTERFOLD: Randy Savage. **Hogan In WCW,** Cactus, Yokozuna, Lawler, Michaels, Jake.

Winter 1994/CENTERFOLD: Terry Funk. **Hulkamania Wild Again,** McMahon, Vicious, AAA, Flair.

January 1995/CENTERFOLD: Razor Ramon. **Tatanka,** Hogan, Alundra, ECW vs. NWA, Brian Lee.

February 1995/CENTERFOLD: Johnny B. Badd. **WCW Civil War,** Pillman & Austin, Abdullah, Bret Hart.

April 1995/CENTERFOLD: Sabu. **WWF Title Turmoil,** Hogan, Cornette, Diesel, Alundra, Rhodes.

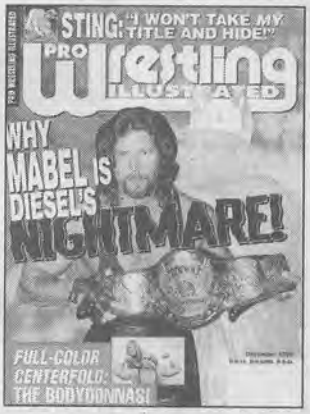
May 1995/CENTERFOLD: Sting. **Diesel,** Savage, Sabu, Hogan-Beefcake, Vader, Owen Hart.

July 1995/CENTERFOLD: Bam Bam Bigelow. **Hulk Hogan,** Sullivan, USWA blood, Yokozuna, revitalize the WWF.

August 1995/CENTERFOLD: Big Van Vader. **Women In Wrestling,** Rottens, Sting-Hogan, Road Warriors.

October 1995/CENTERFOLD: Harlem Heat. **Razor Ramon,** ideal WWF champ, Flair, Savage, Orndorff.

November 1995/CENTERFOLD: Hulk Hogan. **Summerslam,** Vader, Michaels, Backlund, North Korea, ECW rules.


STING: "I WON'T TAKE MY TITLE AND HIDE!"
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WHY MABEL IS DIESEL'S NIGHTMARE!
FULL-COLOR CENTERFOLD: THE BODYDONNAS!

December 1995/CENTERFOLD: Bodydonnas. **Diesel-Mabel,** Sting, Yokozuna, Savio, Regal-Eaton, Lawler-LeDuc.

January 1996/CENTERFOLD: Arn Anderson. **WWF vs. WCW,** Diesel & Shawn, Luger, Summerslam.

February 1996/CENTERFOLD: Shawn Michaels. **Randy Savage,** Hogan, Gangstas-Public Enemy, Austin.

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VOLUME XVIII, No. 6 JUNE 1997

WRESTLING ENQUIRER

WILL MANKIND SPLIT WITH PAUL BEARER?

Crazed Star Not Getting Along With Vader

What once seemed like a perfect relationship between Mankind and Paul Bearer isn't so perfect now. Mankind apparently isn't happy that Bearer signed Vader.

By ANDY RODRIGUEZ

NEW YORK, NY—It was almost four years ago that Big Van Vader nearly ended the career and the life of Mankind (then known as Cactus Jack) by power-bombing him several times on a concrete floor, but Mankind's memory might be better than anyone thought: He's reportedly not very happy that his manager, Paul Bearer, who recently signed Vader to a long-term deal.

Problems between the two wrestlers seemed to exist the first time Bearer put them together as a team. While the two men were wrestling Henry and Phineas Godwinn at a *WWF Monday Night Raw* taping, Mankind accidentally hit Vader with a chair, and that led to a victory for the Godwinns.

But was it really an accident? Mankind was smiling just a little after the match, and Bearer was not too happy with him. A few weeks later on *WWF Shotgun Saturday Night*, Vader and Mankind nearly got into a fight after Vader helped Mankind beat Davey Boy Smith.

"I got no problem with Mankind as long as he does what me and Paul Bearer tell him to do," Vader said.

Many of those who knew Mankind before he joined the WWF last year said he frequently talked about getting revenge on Vader "someday."

"It was always on his mind," said Stevie Richards, who knew him in ECW.

When asked if he still hated Vader and still wanted revenge on him, Mankind just smiled.

Chono Signs Tenzan For NWO

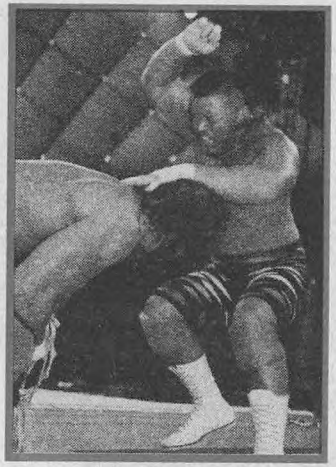
By MATT BROCK

MIYAGI, JAPAN—When he joined the New World Order several months ago, Masa Chono promised his new allies that he'd do everything he could to recruit some of New Japan's top stars for the group. He got his first man, Hiroyoshi Tenzan, in January.

Tenzan, a good friend of Chono, teamed with Marcus Bagwell and Scott Norton, both members of the NWO, to beat Takashi Iizuka, Junji Hirata, and IWGP heavyweight champion Shinya Hashimoto on his first day with the NWO.

"Chono talked to me many times about joining this elite group," Tenzan said through an interpreter, "and everything he said made sense. Only the best wrestlers in the world are worthy of belonging to NWO, and I am honored to be part of it. I am happy to sign a contract with Mr. Eric Bischoff … I am certain many others will follow my lead."

Chono is certain of that, too. He says he and Tenzan will be putting a lot of pressure on their friend Hiro Saito to go NWO, and once they get him, they might go after Jushin Liger, The Great Muta, and even Hashimoto.



Hiroyoshi Tenzan (shown against Randy Savage) became the second Japanese wrestler to sign with the NWO.

Taz Defends Sabu!

By LIZ HUNTER

PHILADELPHIA—The ECW feud between Taz and Sabu will likely come to a head at the federation's first pay-per-view, Barely Legal, on April 13, but Taz surprised some people when he came out for an interview at an ECW Arena card in January and said some almost-complimentary things about his arch-rival.

As fans began to chant Sabu's name, Taz encouraged them to yell louder because Sabu was "about 90,000 miles away" in Japan. But when a group of fans started some anti-Sabu chants, he got very angry.

"What gives you the right to run down one of my contemporaries?" he said. "You never laced up a pair of boots in your life … I might hate Sabu, but you people don't have the right to do so until you've paid your dues … Until then, shut your mouth."

Asked for a comment several days later, Sabu said he didn't need Taz to defend him against anyone.

"He's the one who should shut his mouth," Sabu said through an interpreter.

Another USWA King

By DAVE LENKER

MEMPHIS, TN—Reggie B. Fine is having a colossal identity crisis.

When the USWA branch of the Nation of Domination was being formed a few months ago, Fine jumped at his chance to join. He said he needed to get a fresh start in the USWA and try to get out of his slump, so he was happy to take on the name Kareem Olajuwon.

Unfortunately, the name change did him no good, so he decided in January that another one was in order. He's still with the NOD, but he's now King Reginald!

Fine appeared on one USWA telecast with a crown and cape and explained that he had studied old tapes of Jerry Lawler and noticed that Lawler had gotten his butt kicked on a regular basis before he got his crown and cape. Fine said he had lost so many matches himself that he could "tell you which bulbs are blown on the ceiling."

He won several matches after changing his name to King Reginald; the USWA now has three kings: Reginald, Lawler, and King Mabel.

AROUND THE GLOBE

TOKYO, JAPAN

Just last summer, Rob Van Dam and Sabu were the worst of enemies. Now they're fast becoming one of the best tag teams almost no one is talking about. Not only have the two men come close to winning the ECW tag team title from The Eliminators, they've also come close to capturing the All-Japan Asian tag team title from Takao Omori and Jun Akiyama.

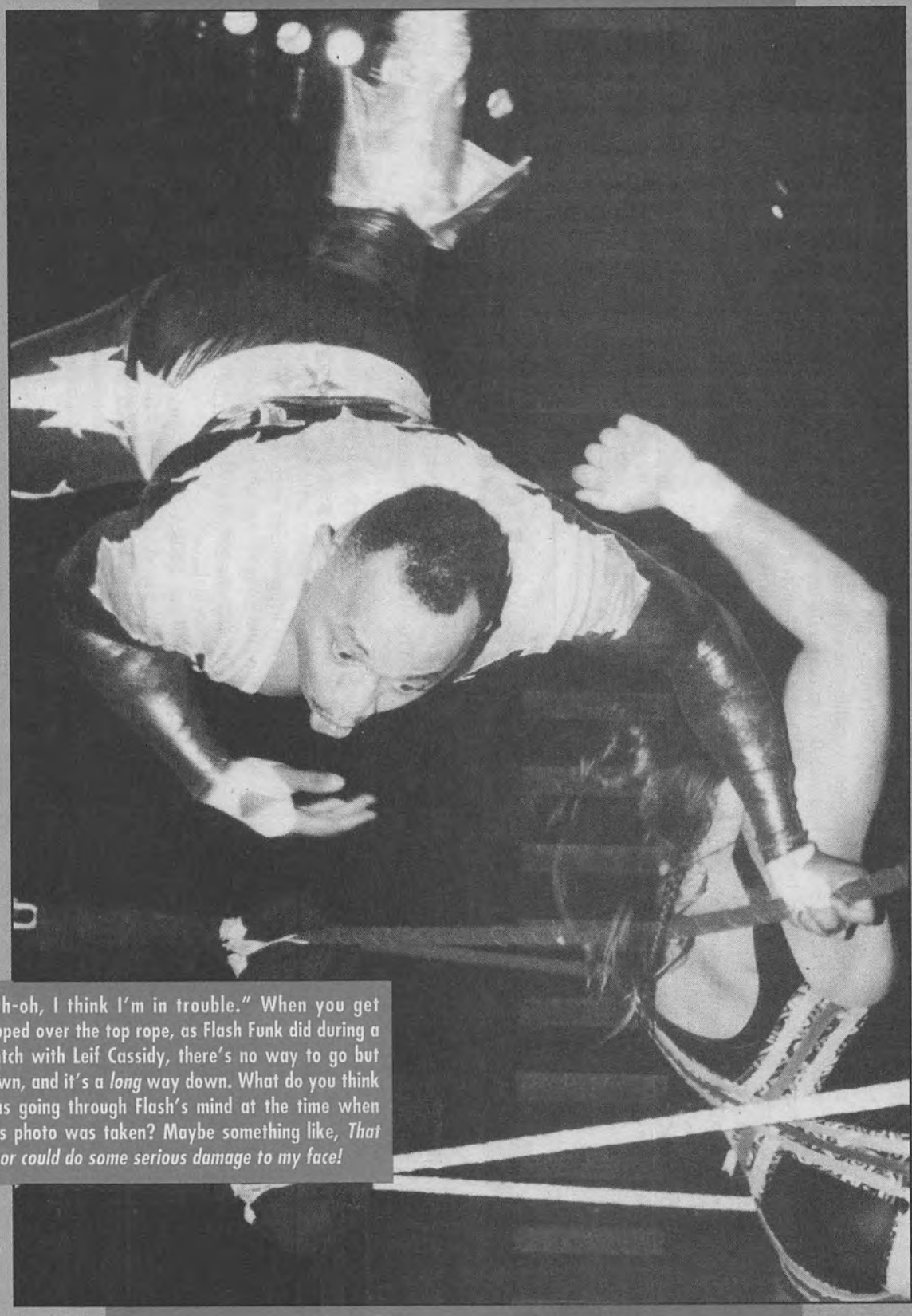
QUEBEC CITY, QUEBEC

Owen Hart won't give up his feud with his brother Bret, and right about now, Steve Austin probably wishes he would have done so a long time ago. Owen once again tried to cause his brother to lose a key match, but in a Bret-Austin match here, Owen's interference backfired, and "Stone-Cold" lost. Austin reportedly had some very harsh words for Owen in the dressing room afterward.

TOKYO, JAPAN

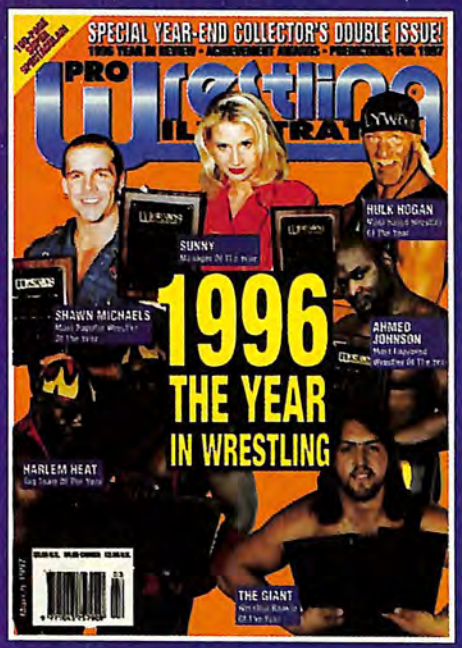
ECW promoters think their federation has some of the most violent (and sometimes gory) specialty matches in the world, but the IWA may have gone one up on ECW this winter. That promotion sanctioned a broken glass window death match between the team of The Great Kabuki, Keisuke Yamada, and Keizo Matsuda and that of Kishin Kawabata, Shigeo Okumura, and Takashi Ishikawa. Kabuki's team won, but absorbed a lot of pain along the way.

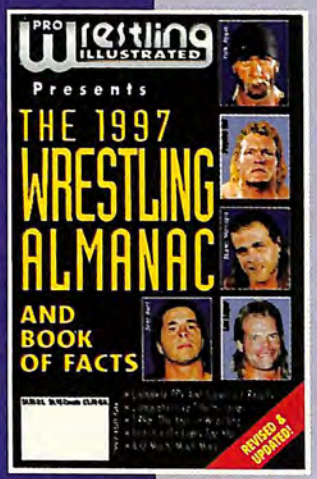
HOT SHOT



"Uh-oh, I think I'm in trouble." When you get flipped over the top rope, as Flash Funk did during a match with Leif Cassidy, there's no way to go but down, and it's a *long* way down. What do you think was going through Flash's mind at the time when this photo was taken? Maybe something like, *That floor could do some serious damage to my face!*

Photo by Bill Apter





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